

Voice from the pew:
The Sacrament of
Reconciliation,
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Friday 17th February 2023

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Cleared priest's anger at threat to freedom

**Court throws out ridiculous charges
against pro-life activists' actions**

Andy Drozdziak

A Catholic priest, found not guilty after being charged for praying within an abortion clinic's censorship zone in Birmingham, has blasted the process which led to his arrest and declared that "a democratic country cannot be in the business of prosecuting people for 'thought-crimes'."

Fr Sean Gough and charity volunteer Isabel Vaughan-Spruce were cleared of all charges in a ruling at Birmingham Magistrates' Court on Thursday 16th February in a landmark case.

Fr Sean was charged for praying within a censorship zone in Birmingham and holding a sign reading 'Praying for free speech'. A further charge was added relating to his car, which for some time has had on it a small 'Unborn lives matter' bumper sticker, and was parked within the same area.

Fr Sean said: "I'm pleased that I've

been cleared of all charges today and to have cleared my name.

"I stand by my beliefs – unborn lives do matter. But whatever your views are on abortion, we can all agree that a democratic country cannot be in the business of prosecuting thought-crimes."

Fr Sean Gough was charged with "intimidating service-users" of the abortion facility in Kings Norton, Birmingham – even though the abortion facility was closed at the time. He said the case highlighted the dangers of introducing censorship zones.

"If the government imposes censorship zones around every abortion facility, as they are considering doing with the Public Order Bill, who knows how many more people will stand trial, even face prison, for offering help, or for praying in their mind?"

Continued on page 2

Faith amid the rubble

Rubble surrounds the altar of a destroyed Catholic church in Iskenderun, Turkey, as authorities revealed the death toll from 6th February's earthquake is now the largest in Turkish history. **More, pgs 2 and 16**
Photo: Benoit Tessier, Reuters



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European synod makes progress
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Headstart hope on Alzheimer's
IN COMPANION



Fr Sean with Isabel Vaughan-Spruce outside the court.
Photo: Simon Caldwell

Joy as charges dropped tempered by concerns over the future risks

Continued from page 1

In December, Isabel Vaughan-Spruce was charged with “engaging in an act that is intimidating to service users,” – even though, like Fr Sean, the abortion facility was closed.

She was seen in a video that went viral being arrested by three police officers after saying that she “might be” praying inside her head.

The area around the abortion clinic near to where she prayed is covered by a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO). This prohibits prayer, distributing information about pregnancy help services, and other activities considered to constitute “protest”.

Vaughan-Spruce said she had been victim of an attempt to curb freedom of speech. “I’m glad I’ve been vindicated of any wrongdoing. But I should never have been arrested for my thoughts and treated like a criminal simply for silently praying on a public street,” she said.

“When it comes to censorship zones, peaceful prayer and attempts to offer help to women in crisis pregnancies are now described as ‘criminal’ or ‘anti-social’. But what is profoundly anti-social are the steps now being taken to censor freedom of speech, freedom to offer help, freedom to pray and even freedom to think.”

The issue has come to the fore as the House of Commons will soon debate the rollout of censorship zones across the country. Clause 9 of the Public Order Bill would criminalise

any form of ‘influencing’ outside of abortion facilities, which would include prayer, with a potential prison sentence of up to two years.

Fr Sean urged the Government to “look into the overwhelming positive work that pro-life groups do to support vulnerable women at their point of need, before censoring the streets of the UK and allowing good people to be criminalised for acts of love.”

His comments follow those of Bishop John Sherrington from the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, who has strongly criticised Clause 9.

“Recent police actions have further exacerbated the concerns of Catholic bishops, and others, regarding the broad legislative proposal of Clause 9 and its implications for freedom of religion, belief, expression, and association,” he said.

Both Isabel and Fr Sean were supported by faith-based charity ADF UK, which seeks to protect and promote fundamental freedoms. Jeremiah Igumnubole welcomed the ruling as a moment of “great cultural significance” – but warned that it may be “a cautionary tale”.

“It’s great that Fr Sean and Isabel have found justice, although with such gruelling legal battles, the process is often the punishment.

“Their case may have closed today, but it should be marked as a cautionary tale.”

He added that “national censorship zones must be rejected.”

CAFOD quick to get key aid in as Catholics rally to ‘quake victims

Catholic charity CAFOD has thanked Catholics for their fabulous response to appeals on behalf of the victims of the earthquakes that devastated Turkey and Syria, saying your aid is already reaching people affected.

The death toll of the 6th February ‘quakes now stands at over 41,000, with many tens of thousands more injured and hundreds of thousands of homes and buildings destroyed.

CAFOD’s local experts are already on the ground and assessing the needs of those affected after the charity committed £100,000 in urgent humanitarian support to survivors.

The people that CAFOD works with are actively helping people in the worst-affected areas, providing shelter, food, water and emergency medical assistance to those in need, as well as winter kits to help people cope with freezing temperatures.

CAFOD is part of the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) which

unites 15 member charities who are experts in humanitarian aid and specialists in different areas of disaster response. DEC has launched an appeal for the earthquake, which has already raised £74 million.

“Our local partners are working tirelessly to support the search and rescue operation, as well as making sure people have water, hot meals, warm clothing and somewhere safe to go,” Hombeline Dulière, CAFOD’s Programme Manager for Syria Crisis Response, said.

Before the earthquake, CAFOD was already working with locals providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable families across Syria that have been affected by the 12 year long conflict.

For Syrians, this is yet another devastating crisis. Even before the earthquake, the situation in the region was already bad, with 80 per cent of people living in poverty. The results of the conflict are still felt today with a col-

lapsing economy and millions who have been forced to leave their homes.

CAFOD is also in touch with its sister agency, Caritas Turkey, on the ground in Türkiye. They are currently assessing needs and delivering essential humanitarian aid.

“It is heart-breaking that this disaster has hit people who have already suffered so much. The impact has been catastrophic and will be felt in the country for years to come,” Hombeline Dulière said.

• More on earthquake: pg 16

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Two women embrace in the shattered remnants of their home in Hayat, Turkey

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Please don't overlook Syria, begs Mary's Meals founder

Andy Drozdziak

The founder of Catholic charity Mary's Meals has made a special plea to support Syrian children affected by the recent earthquake who are suffering in their 'desperate hour of need.'

Magnus Macfarlane-Barrow said there was an urgent need to "help them right now" after the earthquake has left thousands facing homelessness and hunger.

"Until now, Aleppo has been known, mostly, as a city devastated by the war in Syria. But today the world's media is reporting a new horror in the aftermath of earthquakes that have shattered this whole region," Mr Macfarlane-Barrow told the *Universe*.

"It can be tempting to turn away from such raw agony or to just feel overwhelmed and useless. But please, for the sake of those people, let's not do that – because we can, in fact, do something to help them right now."

The quake affected 10 provinces in Turkey that are home to some 13.5 million people, as well as a large area in northwest Syria that is home to millions. President Bashar Assad agreed to open two new crossing points from Turkey near to the coun-



try's rebel-held northwest to deliver desperately needed aid and equipment to millions of earthquake victims.

Mr Macfarlane-Barrow explained the influential role Mary's Meals play in Syria. "We first began working in Aleppo in 2017, moved by how much misery was being suffered there. Ever since then, children have been eating Mary's Meals at school – prepared and served by local volunteers with support from our trusted partner, Dor-

cas," he said.

"Before this latest catastrophe, 5,024 children were receiving our meals every school day and those meals were helping to make their young lives better. But now, the earthquake has ripped everything apart and the streets around their schools (which have now become emergency shelters) are filled with debris, the cries of people grieving, and those with no refuge from the bitter winter weather."

But despite the chaos caused by the earthquake, "the work of Mary's Meals goes on."

"Although the schools are closed, the Dorcas team continues to prepare our meals and offer them to thousands of hungry people – not just the children who used to eat them during lunch break but many others in desperate need of food," he said, adding that *Universe* readers can make a difference through "little acts of kindness."

"Our little acts of kindness become truly enormous in the shattered lives of people in urgent need of hope. I have seen it before, in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake, or the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina," he said.

"Please don't think any donation is too small. And please, pray for those in this desperate hour of need, that they may somehow be comforted and saved from despair."

Want to help?

To donate, please visit marysmeals.org.uk or call 0800 6981212



Pope sends aid package to region

Pope Francis has sent 10,000 thermal shirts to earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria, where millions are sleeping outdoors in below-freezing temperatures.

Hopes of rescuing more survivors from the rubble have now faded, but authorities fear the death toll of over 41,000 may now be added to if vulnerable people are forced to live out in freezing cold temperatures.

The winter clothing was personally transported to Naples by Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, and will be delivered to the Kilis refugee camp in southern Turkey today (17th February). The camp has hosted refugees fleeing the civil war in Syria since 2012 and currently holds some 60,000 people.

Pope Francis has also sent an undisclosed amount of financial aid to the apostolic nunciature in Syria to support the Syrian people.

Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay said that over 1 million people in Turkey are living in temporary housing facilities, such as tents and shipping containers. The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, estimated that as many as 5.3 million people could be left homeless in Syria.

More on Turkey and Syria: see pg 16

Warning as Canada on 'dystopian' path to helping the sick

Andy Drozdziak

Catholic peer Lord Alton has joined Tory MP Danny Kruger in warning that introducing assisted dying in the UK would lead to a "dystopian situation" similar to that seen in Canada.

Lord Alton told an audience in Seoul, South Korea recently that data in Canada shows that euthanasia quickly becomes the practised mode of 'assisted' death.

"Since 'assisted dying' was legalised in Canada in 2016 there...has been an exponential increase," Lord Alton said.

"In its first year, 1,018 people had medical assistance to die. In 2021, that figure was 10,064 – an increase of 889 per cent. Since launch the law has expanded to include people with non-terminal illnesses, and requests are now being made – and approved – on the basis of poverty and lack of disability support."

One Canadian was offered euthanasia within two weeks of seeking help, whereas it took a year before he could see a doctor to treat his condition.

Lord Alton lamented the "inadequate" provision of palliative care, adding that "euthanasia erodes palliative care and hospice provision."

The issue of assisted dying in the UK has come to the fore after public consultations in Westminster, Jersey and the Isle of Man.

MPs on the Health and Social Care

Committee will make recommendations on the issue later this year, while in Scotland, MSP Liam MacArthur has proposed a bill before parliament to introduce 'assisted suicide'.

Danny Kruger, the Conservative MP for Devizes, told BBC's *Newsnight* that Canada was "now on the brink of allowing [assisted suicide] for pretty much anybody who requests it." Canada launched its Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) programme in 2016


'Canada now an absolutely dystopian situation', said Danny Kruger



with stringent safeguards, but many have since been eroded.

Mr Kruger said that "an absolutely dystopian situation has developed since," adding that Canada was now awash with stories of "people who were not terminally ill but who wanted to die because of other reasons... people effectively killed by the state rather than be looked after properly."

Mr Kruger has filmed a Channel 4 documentary with his mother, TV chef Prue Leith, who supports the introduction of assisted suicide, called *Prue and Danny's Death Road Trip*, exploring different perspectives on the assisted suicide debate.


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In brief

Hunt to crack down on sick notes

Doctors will be told to sign fewer people off work with sick notes under upcoming plans in the Budget to get more people back into work and reinvigorate the economy. Some 2.32m people were signed off with long-term health conditions last summer, according to the Labour Force Survey, up from 1.95m in 2019.

Doctors “would be encouraged to focus on recommending ways people with long-term illnesses can continue to work with support”, said the *Daily Telegraph*, rather than using sick notes to authorise them to drop out of the labour market entirely.

But a critic said that Chancellor Jeremy Hunt’s “rhetoric, echoed by the right wing press”, is that “being too ill to work is a lifestyle choice”.

Police warned about Chinese cameras

British police could be spied on by Beijing because of their reliance on Chinese-made cameras, said the government’s independent watchdog on surveillance.

The biometrics and surveillance camera commissioner said most forces across England and Wales use camera equipment that is either made in China or contains important Chinese components.

Alex Younger, the former head of MI6, said the UK should “wake up” to the threat posed by China, adding that western nations were “under full press of Chinese espionage”.

Hate crime link to in trans killing

The murder of transgender girl Brianna Ghey is now being probed as a possible hate crime.

The 16-year-old, from Birchwood in Warrington, Cheshire, was found by members of the public on a path in Linear Park, Culcheth, on Saturday afternoon. Cheshire Police had originally said there was no evidence the teenager was the victim of a hate crime, but now says all lines of inquiry were being explored, “including whether this was a hate crime”.

Friends said she had been bullied for years at school because of her gender identity.

Camilla crown drops divisive diamond

The Queen’s coronation crown will not feature the Koh-i-Noor diamond first worn by Queen Mary, consort of King George V. The diamond is “controversial for the circumstances in which it was acquired, and what it symbolises,” said *The Guardian*. Instead the crown will be reset with diamonds from Queen Elizabeth’s personal jewellery collection.

Government rhetoric blamed for attack on migrants

Andy Drozdziak

Leading Catholic justice charity JRS UK has condemned the “horrifying” violent protests against refugees in Merseyside last weekend.

Fifteen people were arrested after violence outside the Suites Hotel in Knowsley, which is accommodating asylum seekers.

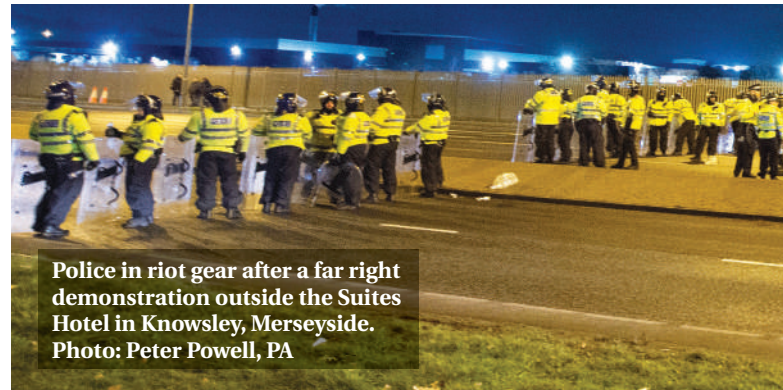
Protestors armed with hammers and fireworks attacked the hotel and set fire to a police van, as residents of the hotel looked on.

“It is distressing to imagine the terrifying impact of this violence on those inside the hotel,” said JRS UK director Sarah Teather. “These are people who have fled war and have already experienced significant trauma.”

“Now they will carry this new trauma too, which is to our shame”.

Merseyside Police said the violence, which was condemned by politicians, left an officer and two members of the public with slight injuries.

Sarah Teather said the violence was stoked by “rising hostility in rhetoric, legislation and policy” by the government. “This episode of violence did not occur in a vacuum. Rhetoric that



Police in riot gear after a far right demonstration outside the Suites Hotel in Knowsley, Merseyside. Photo: Peter Powell, PA

seeks to divide society for short-term political gain has long-term and far-reaching consequences, hardening attitudes and emboldening racism. In these horrifying events we see its sour fruit.”

Jared Skeete, 19, of Irwell Close, Aigburth, Liverpool, was remanded in custody to appear before Liverpool Crown Court on 13th March. Of the remaining 14 people who were arrested, 12 men and two women were conditionally bailed pending the outcome of police inquiries.

Home Secretary Suella Braverman

condemned disorder at the protest, adding that the “alleged behaviour of some asylum seekers is never an excuse for violence”.

But Wigan MP Lisa Nandy criticised the Government for creating a “toxic mix” of anti-migrant rhetoric and poor service provision.

JRS UK called for people from diverse communities across the UK to work together to build a sense of welcome and community. “Hatred and hostility tends to spread,” Ms Teather said. “We cannot afford to let this kind of scapegoating seep deep into our

communities where it may jump from one isolated group to another.”

She called for “sectors, faiths and politics to join together.”

“There are many people in Merseyside working to provide safety to refugees and build bridges between people,” she said.

“The freedom for us all to live alongside one another in peace, safety and security is not something we can take for granted: it is something we have to work at.

“It is time for people across sectors, faiths and politics to join together and play their part.”

A spokeswoman for SHARE Knowsley, a charity which supports refugees and asylum seekers, said: “Thankfully, Friday night is not a reflection of the feelings of the people of Merseyside, which has a great history of welcoming people.

“The outpouring of support we have received since Friday night has been overwhelming.”

A number of organisations have criticised the Government’s “inflammatory language” and policies that “demonise” people seeking refuge.



The group is pictured during its visit to groups working with asylum seekers in Calais

Group encounters real asylum seekers’ stories during visit to camps in Calais

Ellen Teague

Six educators and six young people travelled to Calais last weekend with the Columbans and Hallam Diocese to encounter refugee support in action.

The group visited Secours Catholique (Caritas France), volunteered with Care4Calais and visited Fr Philippe Demeestere at a house of hospitality he runs in Calais. His engagement has included hunger striking for refugees’ rights.

More than 1,000 refugees, fleeing some of the most dangerous countries in the world, live in squalor and hardship in Calais. They are desperate to cross the English Channel to the UK, and hundreds have perished trying to do so.

Messages from the group on social media while in Calais challenged mis-

conceptions, myths and negative perceptions of refugees. These included: ‘25,000 people crossed the Channel in 2022 and faith calls us to welcome them’ and ‘wouldn’t you hope to be welcomed’.

The group brought warm clothing collected in Britain by Hallam parishes and Hallam’s Union of Catholic Mothers.

James Trewby of Columban Education highlighted the “community spirit” the group experienced.

“We were moved by the situations facing refugees, the community spirit amongst those we met, and inspired by the people who serve them and work for justice,” he said.

“We call for Britain to play its part, to live up to its values, and provide safe passage and a much-improved

welcome for people seeking sanctuary in the UK.”

Since 2000 the Missionary Society of St. Columban has committed itself to “continue accompanying and defending the rights of migrants,” and to address the underlying causes of the migration of peoples.

St Chad’s Sanctuary, Jesuit Refugee Service UK, Westminster Justice and Peace Commission, and Justice and Peace Scotland were among the Church signatories who deplored the disturbances at the Suites hotel, Knowsley, on 10th February where several hundred far-right demonstrators protested against asylum seekers housed in a hotel by the Home Office.

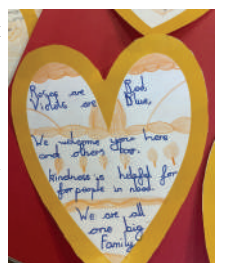
A refugee from Afghanistan was heard to say: “I wasn’t safe in my

country and I’m not safe here.”

The organisations called on those in charge to “create a system that is fair and compassionate and brings cohesion instead of division”.

• On Valentine’s Day, **St Thomas More RC Primary School** was among the Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary to support a national initiative of sending Valentine’s Day ‘orange heart’ messages to the UK government expressing welcome for those seeking sanctuary in Britain.

“We are all one big family,” said one message.



Synod meeting excites laity on its future role

The Catholic Union hosted an online discussion on the Church's Synod on Synodality last week, with an expert panel of speakers.

Well over 100 people attended the event on Thursday, 9th February, which was the Catholic Union's first webinar of 2023. The discussion was hosted on Zoom, giving Catholic Union members and supporters across the country the opportunity to take part.

The speakers for the event were former chaplain to the Queen, Gavin Ashenden, journalist Christopher Lamb, Anna Rowlands, a professor of Catholic Social Thought and Practice at Durham University, and Sr Gemma Simmonds, senior lecturer in Pastoral Theology at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge.

Catholic Union deputy director, James Somerville-Meikle, who chaired the discussion said that "Synods were nothing new in the life of the Church" but added that, when Pope Francis launched the Synod on Synodality in October 2021, it "had the feel of something bigger, broader, and different" to recent Synods.

The event took place at the same

time as bishops gathered in Prague as part of the Continental Stage of the Synod, making the discussion particularly timely. (see report on page 20)

The Catholic Union will be hosting other online and in-person events throughout the year, including webinars and Pub Talks.

James Somerville-Meikle said the Catholic Union had been pleased by the amount of interest shown in the Synod.

"This was a really interesting discussion. Given the number of people who attended, it's clear that there is a lot of interest in the Synod – both in terms of what it means for the life of the Church and our daily lives as Catholics," he told the *Universe*.

"All speakers reflected that we are still at an early stage of the Synod, with much to be worked out between now and the meeting of Bishops in Rome in October 2024.

"Thank you to all our speakers and everyone who took part."

You can watch the synod by clicking here



A new monument to mark the original burial place of St Cuthbert will go on display at Lindisfarne Priory and museum in Northumberland when it reopens this Saturday (18th February), following its closure last year for refurbishment. Susan Harrison, English Heritage's north collections curator, told the *Universe*: "The wealth of artefacts we now have on display is truly astounding, from the famous Viking raider stone, to Britain's first prayer beads."



Diocese sets lead on tackling slavery

The Diocese of Salford issued a new code of conduct to tackle slavery on the ninth International Day of Prayer and Reflection Against Human Trafficking and the Feast Day of St Josephine Bakhita.

Last year, the Diocese of Salford shared its first diocesan Modern Slavery Statement, which was published jointly with Caritas Diocese of Salford, the Cathedral Centre Bookshop, and SDC Trading, the organisation that looks after our parish centres.

Bishop John Arnold said: "People experiencing modern slavery and trafficking should rightly see our churches and social outreach as places of sanctuary and refuge.

"It is important, therefore, to ensure that all members of the church, clergy, parishioners, staff and volunteers are aware of the signs to look out for and how they can help survivors find protection and support."

The diocese has now issued its central suppliers with a new code of con-

duct. "We are aware of the impact we can have as a diocese by using our power to influence the practises of the businesses through our procurement processes," the diocese said.

"The code makes clear that all businesses, charities, and organisations have a responsibility to act in the fight against modern slavery. It represents our efforts to purchase, services and works that avoid exploitative labour practice and have the least negative impact on the environment."

C of E to look at making God 'gender-free'

Simon Caldwell

The Church of England is planning to debate the introduction of liturgy that refers to persons of the Holy Trinity "in a non-gendered way" instead of using male pronouns.

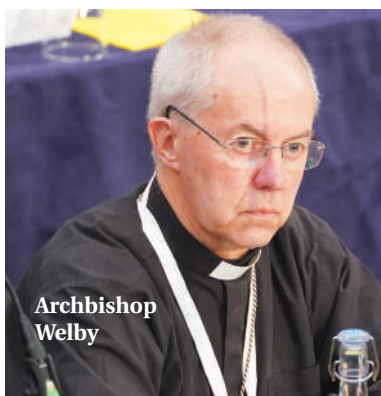
The move was confirmed at the recent General Synod 2023 in London.

The Rev. Joanna Stobart, an Anglican vicar of Ilminster and Whitelackington, asked the Liturgical Commission to provide "an update on the steps being taken to develop more inclusive language in our authorised liturgy and to provide more options for those who wish to use authorized liturgy and speak of God in a non-gendered way, particularly in authorised absolutions where many of the prayers offered for use refer to God using male pronouns."

Bishop Michael Ipgrave of Lichfield, vice chair of the commission, said: "We have been exploring the use of gendered language in relation to God for several years, in collaboration with the Faith and Order Commission."

"After some dialogue between the two commissions in this area, a new joint project on gendered language will begin this spring," he added.

The Church of England signalled that the exercise might not result in the replacement of non-gendered pronouns or alternative references to the persons of the Trinity as substitutes



Archbishop Welby

for Father and Son.

"This is nothing new," the Church of England said in a statement. "Christians have recognised since ancient times that God is neither male nor female," the statement said. "Yet the variety of ways of addressing and describing God found in Scripture has not always been reflected in our worship. There has been greater interest in exploring new language since the introduction of our current forms of service in contemporary language more than 20 years ago."

"The Liturgical Commission has been regularly considering these questions since 2014. As part of its work it will talk to other groups about these issues. There are no plans to abolish or substantially revise current practices.

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— COMMENT — 'Ukraine eyes war's first anniversary with trepidation'

The anticipated Russian spring offensive in Ukraine now appears to be under way, with Ukrainian troops and towns facing a bombardment in an attempt to render promised Western help redundant. Kyiv said its forces had repelled attacks in five settlements in Luhansk and six in Donetsk over the past 24 hours.

Even as the attacks began, Nato allies were still debating when to send tanks, how many and whether to include fighter planes in the package. The recent diplomatic efforts of Volodymyr Zelensky to reinforce Nato support were made all the more urgent by his expectation of a mass onslaught to coincide with the first anniversary of the invasion. Russia has been amassing men and arms for this push and has already reportedly lost thousands of soldiers in an effort to recapture territory retaken by the Ukrainian army, including the beleaguered city of Bakhmut.

President Zelensky says he needs 300 tanks but is unlikely to get anywhere near that. In addition, the capacity of Nato to resupply Ukraine with ammunition and artillery shells seems to be less than that of Russia, whose defence manufacturers have been placed on a war footing. Their troops are firing more shells in a day than European factories produce in a month. Ukraine also wants fighter jets, but is meeting resistance to the idea.

Jens Stoltenberg, the Nato secretary general, vowed that Kyiv would be supported "for as long as it takes". He said there was no sign that Vladimir Putin was preparing for peace.

But all the fine words and plaudits in the world will be meaningless unless actual military assistance arrives and arrives soon, before it is too late.

Sunak: Is he shuffling the deckchairs on his Titanic?

POLITICS

Marc Collinson

Prime minister Rishi Sunak last week announced a major reorganisation of Whitehall, creating a new department dedicated to energy and another for science and innovation as well bringing various business and trade portfolios under one roof.

Reorganisations of this kind tell voters a great deal about the government of the day and its priorities. Sunak's announcements are revealing not only as signals of his aims ahead of the next election but also of the pressures he faces.

The evolution of the departments dealing with housing over the years is a case study in how priorities are reflected in departmental reorganisation, and can help us understand what is going on now.

Clement Attlee's Labour government created a Ministry of Local Government and Planning in 1950, at a time when housing was needed and local authorities were seen as the obvious landlords.

The following year, the department was renamed 'Housing and Local Government' by the Conservatives. This was clearly linked with their promise to supercharge house building.

This ministry lasted until 1969, when it was renamed first by Labour and again a year later by Ted Heath in a merger that included the Ministry for Transport and the Ministry for Public Buildings and Works. Together, they all became the Department of the Environment. Priorities had shifted from construction to management of the overall urban environment.

In the 50 years that followed, multiple prime ministers rejigged housing and planning to reflect their various agendas. This includes the 2021 addition of "levelling up" to its title. Before that, Theresa May's 2018 rebranding of the Department for Communities and Local Government as a Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government reflected the



growing political significance of the housing crisis. Her decision also demonstrates that priorities can be cyclical as well as linear.

Of course, there is more to Sunak's choices than meets the eye. The creation of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, to be led by experienced minister Grant Shapps, shows how Sunak is seeking to unite the more progressive elements of the Conservative coalition (who support net zero) with those who see the most pressing energy issues as being related to the war in Ukraine and the associated price spikes.

Two previous premiers have created standalone energy departments. Heath established one in 1974 during an energy crisis that was hitting households in similar ways to the current situation. Gordon Brown set up the Department of Energy and Climate Change in 2008, which lasted until 2016 when May dissolved it.

Neither Heath nor Brown reaped any electoral benefit from their signalled commitment to energy issues, and the same may well be true for Sunak. The new department is perhaps more important in relation to how it ties the priorities of different Conservative groups together. This is a careful attempt to elide two seemingly contradictory agendas that centre on energy production.

Sunak is reshaping his cabinet to

present a unified vision from a party disunited over how to address the climate emergency, while showing awareness of difficult economic circumstances. In many ways, this is institutional reform as gymnastics.

Sunak has also recreated a ministry overseeing science, innovation and technology under Michelle Donelan. With the underlying themes of modernity and future, a science department allows Sunak to project a forward-thinking government.

He is not the first to try to incorporate government engagement with these important agendas through rearranging departments. Harold Wilson created the Ministry of Technology in 1964 to tap into excitement created by his "white heat of technology" speech. Brown created the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills with a similar goal in mind – although he subsequently subjected the department to numerous rebrands and mergers.

Whether Sunak will succeed here is again questionable. As much as anything else, the new department is perhaps recognition that the Conservative party, 13 years into government, is worried about the perception that it has not delivered on these agendas.

The merging of two departments into the new Department for Business and Trade, meanwhile, effectively recreates the old

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) – which was itself created twice (1970 and 1983) by Conservative prime ministers before being split up or refocused by Labour. It also marks the end of the short-lived Department for International Trade, created by May as part of her bid to establish 'Global Britain' in the wake of Brexit.

Sunak's decision to axe her department suggests that the existence of two ministries dealing with trade and business has perhaps hampered the government's ability to engage properly with industry.

Why reorganise?

Government reorganisations are more than deckchair rearrangements or market-friendly rebranding. They reflect the assumptions, priorities and choices that constrain government policy. They elaborate the ideas and political concerns influencing those who govern. They even explain internal power relations and the fluctuating influence of individuals.

Many of these changes are designed to combat criticism. Together with Sunak's recent announcement of his "five priorities", they are designed to arrest a sense of drift. After recent resignations and potential trouble over bullying accusations directed at his deputy, Sunak is trying to unite his party behind a coherent programme – with appropriate government machinery to deliver it.

Unfortunately, history suggests that such improvisation often begets transient ministerial departments that only last for a short while, until the next major crisis. Sunak may simply be repeating the mistakes of both recent and other past premiers.

He is trying to give his government direction and fresh purpose, to extend its life and relevance. But instead of constant change in Whitehall, what is needed are resilient units that can be repurposed to suit changing political priorities.

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“The earth is filled with harmony and trust when the alliance between man and woman is lived well.”

– Pope Francis

Containment or care?

Sir John Battle



One of the most dispiriting experiences of my time as an MP was calling on a local care home for young people in my constituency. A parent had contacted me to say her 15-year-old daughter had disappeared from the home that week, and she was desperate for her to be found. As I walked across to the home a local police officer spotted me and called over. "Where are you going this afternoon?" he politely asked. When I said I was visiting the care home, he replied "I don't know why you bother going there; it's just prison fodder of the future".

He, like many others, had simply written off the young people there. He did spell out how it was an unworkable place with underpaid, undertrained and too few staff to manage the occupants who, despite their young ages, were not locked in and could simply walk out and abscond.

"They can't be contained," he added. Any concept of 'care' was basically replaced by the idea of 'containment'. The visit simply confirmed the challenges despite heroic efforts by the overstretched staff. Today, years later, more than 82,000 children are living in care in our society, up from 69,000 in 2015 and the number is rising.

Moreover, disturbingly, more than half of those in the care system will have a criminal record by the age of 24. The strains on the system mean that the young people in care are regularly shifted around from one care home to another, often miles away from their home town and connections with family and friends, creating a profound sense of dislocation and instability. A recent Government response to an enquiry into young persons looked after in care homes and foster homes has focused on increasing the funding support for those who leave care homes at 16, to make the move out of care 'as smooth as possible.'

Welcome though raising the leaving care allowance is (from £2,000 to £3,000) as part of a larger investment in the new care strategy, encouraging a move out of care homes into independent living cannot be a substitute for investing properly in places that offer security (in the best personal sense), stability, love and real care led by well-supported, rewarded and backed-up staff, that really provides a foundation for childhood growth and development in spite of circumstances well beyond their control.

Writing off our children in a world of disruption and increasingly damaged and broken parental relationships at least is getting some attention.

It needs priority action and investment as part of developing a future 'economics of caring'.

It's not art as Tate loses its way with its drag queen act

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Caroline Farrow



As the *Universe Catholic Weekly* reported last week, I am currently running a campaign aimed at the Tate Britain, which is enthusiastically promoting gender ideology to schoolchildren, instead of instilling them with an appreciation of art.

Sometimes you might wonder why I bother, given that sexual identity politics seems to have become embedded into the fabric of British society. I am well aware that to impartial observers I have become the modern-day equivalent of Mary Whitehouse, always raising my voice over what might seem to be trifles, but it seems to me that we are in a battle for the hearts, minds and souls of the next generation.

For those who might not have been following the story, Tate Britain chose to platform and showcase a deeply inappropriate adult performer, a drag queen by the name of Aida H Dee, to kick off its half-term week, at a time when the management knew that many young families would be visiting.

'Aida' is one of the UK's most famous drag queens, and features regularly at libraries across the country, reading stories to young children, supposedly to teach them about tolerance and diversity.

The performer behind 'Aida' is a man called Seb Samuel who, if we were living in a sane world, would not be allowed anywhere near a classroom, thanks to the sexually explicit nature of his social media posts, which don't bear repeating.

To be clear, Mr Samuel doesn't post smut or innuendo, but posts of an x-rated variety, including the disturbing slogan, 'love has no age', a phrase that has links with some disreputable organisations from the past that I'm sure he wouldn't wish to be associated with.

Other posts include cartoons of young people captioned with filthy sexual comments and a photograph of an adolescent boy accompanied by an elderly man, noting that in a gay nightclub both would be unquestioningly accepted as being in their mid twenties.

If a primary school teacher were to engage in similar conduct they would be sacked for bringing their school into disrepute and also face a professional hearing, yet because Mr Samuel's character promotes LGBTQ inclusiveness, the Tate has decided to turn a blind eye.

If Mr Samuel's social media is not enough to raise red flags, then his tight-fitting costume which accentuates his 'crown jewels'



Aida H Dee, is to kick off the Tate's half-term week, at a time when the management knew that many young families would be visiting.

certainly should, especially when many of his publicity shots feature small children with their faces innocently coming within inches of his crotch as they wrap their arms around his legs for a hug.

I am not claiming that Samuel's has improper motives towards the young children he is there to entertain. My concern is that he presents a highly sexualised persona, and it is that that presents a problem. It's not a question of being a prude or nurturing a raging hatred for the LGBTQ community; rather, it is to be made uncomfortable by someone with an overt or flamboyant sexuality, especially when they are trying to normalise this to children.

Even if Mr Samuel's had a totally clean social media record and perfectly modest costume, many parents would still consider his act to be unsuitable for children as drag is a niche form of adult entertainment, which many women find insulting, offensive and misogynistic as it plays into extreme caricatures of femininity.

'Aida' is not the only problematic feature of Tate Britain's offering to children either. They are putting on a series of Spring workshops for

children, whereby all artists introduce themselves with their pronouns, implanting or reinforcing the idea that biological identity is something that can be chosen or altered, and where according to the blurb, artists explore concepts of 'transness' with schoolchildren.

Tate have also produced a guidance booklet for primary and secondary schools whereby they encourage schools to invite drag or transgender artists in for a performance or to lead a workshop. The guidance, entitled 'Let me show you a body' suggests that teachers do activities with their pupils such as drawing and writing what they feel about their bodies and 'making them shout out in anger about gender'. Tate tells primary school teachers to get their pupils discussing their sexuality and also suggests that they break the law by not warning children to use the wrong toilets or changing rooms.

There is no other word for this than propaganda, and it's just another example of how children are being quietly groomed and indoctrinated into ideas that are deeply harmful on a spiritual, emotional and physical level, behind their parents' backs.

This is not simply more middle-aged reactionism from yours truly, but another concrete example of how publicly-funded institutions are stealthily changing hearts and minds and influencing the zeitgeist. Most parents are busy and also innately trusting.

Once upon a time, if you learned that your child was going on a trip to Tate Britain or Tate Modern with their school's art department, or that a famous art gallery is sending artists into your school for an enrichment event, you would have been delighted that they were being given a cultured education. Not any more.

In this week's general audience Pope Francis has reminded Christians that we aren't called to argue, counter-attack and defend ourselves when evangelising, but instead be meek and humble. I've found this challenging in the light of my calling, which is to attempt to defend children and families from what is an aggressively secular and anti-Christian culture, which attempts to supplant Christianity with something altogether more insidious. It is difficult to be meek and humble when defending and protecting children from ideas that we can never condone.

We do also have to be wary of picking wise battles and not catastrophising or over-reacting to every slight. That said, I think when it comes to moulding the minds of little ones, the Holy Father would be rather more trenchant. Not least, because the great tragedy of the Tate, is that art has the potential to transform and transcend and to lead to the divine. In its purest form it ought to reflect the glory of God.

All of us, especially children, deserve so much better than the bland, shallow, politics of sexual identity.

“

My concern is that he presents a highly sexualised persona, and it is that that presents a problem. It's not a question of being a prude or nurturing a raging hatred for the LGBTQ community; rather, it is to be made uncomfortable by someone with an overt or flamboyant sexuality, especially when they are trying to normalise this to children.

Catholics urged to take faith out into the political world

Famous American Catholic evangelist Bishop Barron has told the Catholic Union that Christians were called to “address the moral issues of the day” such as beginning and end of life care, and care for the poor and marginalised in society.

In an interview with James Somerville-Meikle, the Catholic Union's deputy director, the bishop called on Catholics to get involved in politics as “happy warriors”. “The laity are called to sanctify the world” he said, and “one way of doing that is through political action.”

Bishop Barron spoke about the United States, where citizens pledge allegiance as one nation under God. He said this needed to be taken seriously as “when God is lost, our politics is lost.”

Bishop Barron, who is Bishop of Winona-Rochester (USA) and founder of the Word on Fire Ministries, was in London for a week-long visit organised by Catholic Voices. As part of this he addressed the Sharing The Church's Story conference at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre in London.

Catholic Voices shared their delight at the conference. “The Sharing the Church's Story Conference was a day filled with powerful talks, connection



Bishop Robert Barron speaking at the 'Sharing the Church's Story' Conference
Photo: Catholic Voices

and (of course) Bishop Barron. We are thrilled with how the Conference went,” a spokesperson said.

The theme for the visit was the contribution of Christianity to the public conversation.

Earlier in the week, Bishop Barron addressed religious and civic leaders in a speech in Parliament. He also met the Prime Minister's senior adviser on community and faith engagement in No 10 Downing Street, and celebrated Mass in the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft in Parliament.

Bishop Barron ended his London Tour by celebrating Mass at Westminster Cathedral.

James Somerville-Meikle said: “It's been a great joy having Bishop Barron in London this week. I know his words have inspired many people, especially those of us engaged in public life.

“Bishop Barron has reminded us of the wonderful Christian heritage we have in this country, not least the fact that our national flag bears three crosses – once the symbol of fear and oppression, now the symbol of hope

and love. I was delighted to have the chance to sit down with Bishop Barron to talk about Catholic engagement in public life.

“It's a subject the Bishop has a lot to contribute to and I hope people enjoy listening to the conversation.”

Listen in full

Click here to listen to the full interview with Bishop Barron



A&E waiting times on the rise

Some hospitals in England have A&E waiting times of over four hours for more than 50 per cent of patients.

After analysing data for December and January, the BBC found that Hull University Hospitals, Wye Valley and Shrewsbury and Telford were worst for A&E waits.

Ambulances and A&Es have struggled during the NHS's worst winter since records began but “the impact of those delays has not been felt evenly across the country”, said the corporation.

The best trust out of the 107 providing data, Northumbria Healthcare, had fewer than 10% of patients waiting more than four hours.

Firms tried to weaken water clean-up

Several water giants “privately lobbied” to “weaken” the government's £56bn plan to reduce sewage spills from storm overflows, reported *The Times*. The companies argued that the move risked driving up consumer bills by thousands of pounds, with one firm saying that the cost of living crisis would be a “real humdinger” for cleaning up rivers and beaches.

The private arguments were a contrast to the industry's public stance: Water UK, the trade body, said that “companies agree there is an urgent need to do more and are ready to invest”.



Pauline is presented with her medal by the British High Commissioner in Malawi, Sophia Willitts-King

Malawi charity founder honoured by late Queen

Pauline Webber, retired teacher and founder of the Nick Webber Trust, has received her British Empire Medal for services to charity in Malawi.

The British High Commissioner in Malawi presented the medal to Pauline at a ceremony in the African nation.

Pauline, who lives in Clymping, West Sussex and is a member of St Richard's Catholic Church in Slindon, was recognised by the Queen in her final Birthday Honours list last June. The medal was awarded for outstanding contribution to charity, education and justice in Malawi through the Nick Webber Trust.

Pauline, with her children and friends, set up the Trust in memory of her son, Nick Webber, who died tragically in a car accident at the age of 28 while working in Malawi as a

volunteer lawyer.

The trust continues her son's work by supporting some of Malawi's poorest and most-marginalised people through funding projects in education, healthcare and community support, as well as access to justice.

Pauline Webber said she was “surprised but delighted” with the honour, and to “receiving it here in Malawi is extra special”.

It is a pleasure to accept this award on behalf of everyone who has supported the Nick Webber Trust, and dedicate it to the memory of my beloved late son, Nick.

“We wouldn't be able to do anything without the help of our generous supporters, many of whom are friends from the local church communities in Sussex.”

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Public Engagement by Catholics for the Common Good

In brief

Watchdog ends Labour measures

Labour has been taken out of special measures by the equalities watchdog, as the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said it is satisfied with action taken by the party to improve how it handles antisemitism complaints.

The EHRC investigation found unlawful harassment of Jewish members in the party during Jeremy Corbyn's leadership.

Labour leader Keir Starmer welcomed the development, but added: "I see this as a signpost that we are heading in the right direction."

For "many British Jews, Labour is no longer seen as toxic", said the *Jewish Chronicle*.

New Brexit deal 'next week'

A new Brexit deal could be weeks away after the UK "watered down its headline resistance" to European judges ruling on issues in Northern Ireland, said *The Telegraph*.

Under the reported plan, goods travelling from the mainland UK destined only for Northern Ireland will not face physical customs checks due to a new system of "red" and "green" lanes.

According to sources, Rishi Sunak is due to finalise talks with some European leaders later this week, with next week pencilled in for the announcement.

Council tax set to rise in April

Council tax for millions of families will soar above £2,100, with bills set to rise by the maximum amount across three-quarters of England.

Three in four of the local authorities that have published their plans so far have said they will increase their rates by 4.99 per cent from April – the maximum allowed without a local vote. It will add £100 a year to bills for average Band D properties.

Low tax campaigners told *The Telegraph* that the rises are "the last thing hard-pressed households need."

Police 'missed Couzens chances'

Police missed "clear chances" to identify Wayne Couzens as a danger to women before he murdered Sarah Everard, said *The Guardian*. Couzens exposed himself to women three times, and even though witnesses provided the registration of his car, the police took no action. The last incident took place just six days before Everard's kidnap, rape and murder in 2021, at a drive-through restaurant.

POLITICS

Murray Leith

When Jacinda Ardern resigned as New Zealand's prime minister a few weeks ago, Nicola Sturgeon assured voters she still had plenty left in the tank. Yet apparently, Scotland's First Minister had been thinking about her own future for some time. She said so in her resignation speech on Wednesday, which came as a surprise to much of Scotland.

Despite a recent and consistent wave of difficulty and controversy over the gender recognition reform bill, the quest for another independence referendum, a finance investigation into the SNP and the ongoing 'ferry fiasco', there was no clear indication that Sturgeon was going to quit.

Having been in parliament since the age of 29 and Scotland's leader since 2014, Sturgeon is both the first female, and longest serving, first minister. She said she will stay on until her successor is elected. But that successor will inherit a government wrestling with several controversies and constitutional questions.

Sturgeon's life's mission of Scottish independence remains unfulfilled – and Scotland is deeply divided about "indyref2". Recent polls have shown support for independence, but there are indications that support may be slipping away in light of the ongoing challenges facing the SNP-led Scottish government.

The future of indyref2

Three Conservative prime ministers (Theresa May, Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak) have all refused to grant the Scottish parliament authority to hold another independence referendum, saying "now is not the time". And the UK supreme court ruled in November 2022 that the Scottish parliament does not have the authority to hold a referendum on independence without Westminster's permission.

This has led to a divide within the SNP about how to achieve independence. Sturgeon had announced that her "plan C" was to approach the next general election as a de facto referendum on independence.

This was met with mixed reactions from within the SNP; other nationalist movements, and the wider public. SNP MP Stewart McDonald was particularly vocal, highlighting this move as damaging for the independence movement. Alex Salmond's Alba Party has also been very critical of the plan.

However dominant the SNP has been in Scottish politics over the last decade, it has never secured more than 50 per cent of the votes cast in Scotland at any UK general election. No party has achieved this level of support in Scotland since the 1950s,



First Minister Nicola Sturgeon speaking during a press conference at Bute House in Edinburgh when she announced that she will stand down as First Minister of Scotland after eight years.

Sturgeon's surprise leaves cloudy legacy for the SNP to clear

although the SNP came very close in its landslide UK general election of 2015.

Not winning 50 per cent of the vote at the next election would mean the SNP has difficult questions to answer about Plan C and the future of the independence discussion. Sturgeon's resignation opens the door for a reconsideration of this approach.

And while Sturgeon emphasised that she is not leaving because of recent political pressures, there have been issues which have made her last few weeks particularly controversial – chiefly, the gender recognition reform bill, which the UK government blocked from receiving royal assent.

This was the first time the UK government has intervened to prevent legislation passed by any devolved body from becoming law.

To members and supporters of the SNP, it is part of an ongoing intransigence and political interference from the UK government. The SNP, and others, consider this an assault on devolution itself. The implications for intergovernmental relationships within the UK are not fully clear, but the frosty relationship between

Holyrood and Westminster became even colder.

However, for all the debate and vitriol surrounding the gender bill, it's important to remember that it passed quite easily – 88 votes in support (drawn from all parties in the Scottish parliament) and only 33 against (drawn from two parties, the majority of Scottish Conservatives aligned with seven SNP MSPs). The latter was a rare occurrence: transgender issues, and the bill on gender recognition in particular, have highlighted a divide within the SNP – a party legendary for its internal discipline and focus.

The recent case of transgender prisoners within Scottish jails led to a very public debate, and the reversal of the Scottish Prison Service's policy that allowed trans prisoners to be accommodated based on their self-declared gender. As the issue dominated headlines, polling showed declining support for Sturgeon and the SNP.

Taken together, this leaves the next, yet to be chosen First Minister with several issues (constitutional, legal and social) to deal with. Sturgeon's departure has left a clouded political picture – with no immediate successor clear, and

several constitutional and party issues unresolved.

Leadership legacy

Sturgeon's no-nonsense, direct approach is a reason why she remains one of the most admired politicians in the UK. She has commanded a level of positive support that few others – especially the several Conservative prime ministers who have come and gone during her tenure – could match. Under her leadership, the SNP has dominated parliamentary elections in Scotland, whether for Holyrood or Westminster.

The SNP has been the party of government in Scotland for the past 15 years, and Sturgeon has been its face for the past eight. As she underlined in her resignation speech, she has come to represent these issues and debates in the public eye.

By stepping down, she appears to hope this will allow for a more reasoned debate around the issues that Scotland faces, and the aim of independence that the SNP cherishes.

Murray Leith is a Professor of Political Science, University of the West of Scotland

Dublin shrine still proving a big draw for loving couples

Couples hoping to be lucky in love have been visiting a shrine in Dublin which contains the partial remains of St Valentine.

Engaged couples had their wedding rings blessed at the Carmelite Church in Whitefriar Street on Monday by Bishop Denis Nulty at the shrine of St Valentine.

The historic city centre church is a traditional place of pilgrimage at this time of the year.

Among those at the church were engaged couples Gavin and Patrick Corcoran, and Ilona Catharine Dorrepaal and Patrick Michael Lennon.

Bishop Nulty spoke about the “profound decision” to enter into marriage in the presence of the two couples.

“The sacrament of marriage reassures every couple that God will never leave them. This joy is what we are celebrating this day that He is always by our side,” he said.

“Choosing to celebrate the sacrament of marriage is a profound decision in the life of a couple. Our two couples represent the many couples across this island who will celebrate the sacrament this coming year, connecting their love for one another to

the source of love, who is God.

“A sacrament is like the 3-D glasses we watched movies with; love is not just between the couple themselves, but firmly united with God.”

The bishop, who is Bishop of Kildare & Leighlin and President of Accord Catholic Marriage Care Service CLG, also spoke about the importance of accompanying couples on their life journey.

“Pope Francis is very anxious that we accompany couples in their life journey,” he said.

“Like God, we too are by their side, walking alongside the couple, at their pace, in their step. The day a couple celebrates the sacrament of marriage is a huge day of joy and celebration.”

Addressing the couples present, he said: “Today is about Ilona and Patrick, and Orla and PJ who, like thousands before them, have come to the Shrine of St. Valentine for a blessing, as they continue their preparation for marriage. We pray for them and all couples preparing for the sacrament at this time.”

The remains of St Valentine, put to death in Rome in the third century for refusing to renounce his Christian



faith, ended up in Dublin when they were gifted to an Irish preacher, Father John Spratt, by Pope Gregory XVI in 1836.

Ilona and Patrick said they chose to be married in the Church because they both grew up going to church with their parents from strong Catholic backgrounds. They were also both altar servers when they were children. Orla and Patrick (PJ) Corcoran said that they “both share a strong faith and our Irish tradition.”

Pictured above, Bishop Denis Nulty blesses engaged couples (left to right) Ilona Catharine Dorrepaal and Patrick Michael Lennon, and Orla Gavin and Patrick Corcoran, at the shrine of the holy relics of Saint Valentine in the Carmelite Church in Dublin city. (right)

Photo: Niall Carson, PA



Lovers flock to the ‘wee bit’ of St Valentine that Glasgow is proud to claim as its own

Andy Drozdziak

The city of Glasgow is home to some of the remains of the patron saint of lovers.

The forearm of St Valentine is said to be kept in a chest at the Blessed John Duns Scotus Catholic church in the Gorbals. They have been kept there since 1993, when they were taken from the St Francis chapel nearby. Before then they had sat in relative anonymity for around 100 years after being shipped over from Europe by monks who were impressed with the faith in Glasgow.

Charlie Gribben from Strathclyde Catholics filled in the gaps about the ‘real’ St Valentine. “We know that he must have ministered to persecuted Christians because, at the time, Christianity wasn’t as widespread as it is now, or as legal as it is now,” Mr Gribben said.

“His reputation as being a patron of love is down to ministering to persecuted Christians – that would have been marriage as well.



Marrying people in secret would have been something he would have done.”

Every year on 14th February, the wooden box adorned with gold plated letters that read ‘Corpus

Valentini Martyris [the Body of the martyr Valentine] is decorated with flowers to commemorate his life and a Mass is also said.

It is thought the bones came to be in Glasgow after they were donated

by a wealthy French family in 1868.

They were brought to Glasgow’s Church of St Francis and kept there for over a century.

Lovers often make a pilgrimage to the spot and, on occasion, there

Visitor Yuki Fan beside the chest containing bones belonging to St Valentine at the Blessed John Duns Scotus Catholic church in the Gorbals, Glasgow. PA Wire/PA Images Picture by: Andrew Milligan

have been proposals at the church.

Glasgow is one of several European cities claiming to host some remains of St Valentine. His skull is said to be in the Basilica Di Santa Maria in Rome, whilst other remains are said to be held at churches including Dublin (see above), Prague and Madrid.

Glasgow altar server Aidan Callaghan commented on the variety of relics. “Usually churches will fight or disagree with each other as to who’s got the true relic, but in the case of St Valentine, everyone seems happy to have their own respective wee bits,” Mr Callaghan said.

14th February became a feast day in the Church by Pope Gelasius in 496 AD in honour of Valentine’s martyrdom.

He was said to have broken Roman law to conduct marriages in secret for persecuted Christians and was jailed. When he refused to renounce his faith, he was executed on 14th February, 270AD.

Demand grows as CRE looks to take on more space for exhibition

Strong demand for stands at this year's Christian Resources Exhibition (CRE) has encouraged the event's organisers to expand the exhibition floor area.

CRE Midlands will take place at Cranmore Park, Solihull, near Birmingham, on 8th and 9th November – replacing the annual exhibition usually held in October at Sandown Park.

Founded in 1985, the National Christian Resources Exhibition has grown to become the largest annual event of its kind in Europe, with regular regional exhibitions in cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, Exeter, Glasgow and Belfast.

CRE event director Brett Pitchfork spoke of his hopes for the event.

"With several organisations booking space every week, we can now offer positions in the venue's Diamond Suite," he said.

"This will enable us to run Mission on the Map, where agencies will come together to focus on mission opportunities and resources, at home and abroad."

Securing the Diamond Suite also means the event's talks and arts programme will be increased, with a third presentation area in the body of the hall.

"We are grateful to our loyal exhibitors for supporting us through Covid and beyond," Mr Pitchfork said.

"It is also encouraging to see several new organisations taking the opportunity of reaching key local church leaders throughout the Midlands and beyond."

"The venue is conveniently located in a major conurbation, near the motorway network. At similar centres nearby, parking can prove prohibitively expensive but Cranmore Park has free



parking for hundreds of vehicles."

Mr Pitchfork added that the "limited floor space is in high demand" and is encouraging organisations wishing to exhibit to get in touch with CRE (*see below*).

Rev Mike Royal, general secretary at Churches Together in England, spoke of the 'unique opportunity' for Birmingham. "I'm delighted CRE is coming to Birmingham," Rev Royal said. "It provides a unique opportunity for Church and charity leaders to engage with the widest network of Christian organisations."

• CRE Midlands 2023 at Cranmore Park, Solihull, opening hours: Wednesday 8th November, 10am-5pm; Thursday 9th November, 10am-4.30pm. See www.creonline.co.uk for more information or contact CRE owner Steve Goddard 0161 240 4500 or 07930 198209 E: steve@creonline.co.uk



With love, from Mercy Ships

The world's largest charity hospital ship – the *Global Mercy* – has arrived in West Africa and is preparing to deliver its first surgeries onboard.

The new Mercy Ships vessel will provide free, safe surgery and medical care to some 800 patients from Senegal and The Gambia over the next five months while in the port of Dakar, and train local medical professionals.

International charity Mercy Ships has been working in partnership with the health ministries in both Senegal and The Gambia to serve both countries over the coming months. Nine out of 10 people in sub-Saharan Africa do not currently have access to safe surgery, The Lancet Commission says.

Mercy Ships is a faith-based international development organisation that deploys hospital ships to deliver free healthcare to some of the poorest countries in the world.

Around 50 crew from Britain and Ireland will serve in Senegal over the next five months, including 15 nurses and 15 doctors, as well as teachers, engineers, an accountant, clerical and

housekeeping staff.

The *Global Mercy* was docked in Dakar in 2022 and delivered training to Senegalese health professionals, but it has never hosted surgery on board its state-of-the-art hospital.

The *Global Mercy* is 174 metres long, 28.6 metres wide, with space for 200 patients, six operating theatres, a laboratory, general outpatient clinics, dental and eye clinics, and training facilities. The hospital decks cover a total area of 7,000 square metres and contain the latest training facilities.

The ship can accommodate up to 950 people when docked, including crew members – most of whom are volunteers – from all over the world. It will serve collaboratively in the future with the Africa Mercy.

Joanne Balaam, Chief Executive Officer of Mercy Ships UK, said: "The *Global Mercy* welcoming its first patients onboard will be a landmark moment for all Mercy Ships supporters. This work is only made possible thanks to our dedicated volunteers and our generous supporters. Without

your ongoing support, we would not be able to continue this truly life-changing work with so many patients, their families and communities."

Gert van de Weerdhof, Chief Executive Officer of Mercy Ships International, said: "The *Global Mercy's* arrival in Dakar is particularly meaningful to our team, as this year, we will be serving the people of both Senegal and The Gambia thanks to partnerships with their ministries of health."

"We anticipate that over the next five months more than 800 maxillo-facial, paediatric orthopaedic, paediatric general, general, and eye surgeries will be carried out on board, with up to a quarter coming from The Gambia."

When the *Global Mercy* visited Senegal in 2022, more than 260 Senegalese healthcare professionals received training in a variety of courses, including Surgical Skills, SAFE Anaesthesia, and Nursing Skills.

In 2023, Mercy Ships anticipates providing training for more than 600 medical professionals, to create long-lasting impact.

Rise up and proclaim your faith at Flame 2023

Andy Drozdziak

Excitement is growing among youth leaders for young people to 'live out their faith out loud' and become less anxious at Flame, the largest Catholic Youth event in the UK, in the face of mental health challenges.

Flame will take place on 4th March at OVO Arena, Wembley, and Tra-my Nguyen, a youth leader with the Assumption Sisters in London, is hoping that her group have a positive experience of belonging in the Church. "I hope that the younger participants can be encouraged by the older participants to be able to live out their faith out loud," Tra-my told the Universe.

"I hope that they will be moved by the crowds of people who share their faith and will be able to share the good news and their personal reflections to those who couldn't make the event themselves."

Her comments came as the recent annual State of the Nation report found that "significant



challenges" remained during the 2021/22 school year, adding that anxiousness among both primary and secondary-age pupils "appears to have increased" and is higher than in 2020/21.

The DfE report stated that issues 'such as anxiousness among

primary and secondary-age pupils, and loneliness and mental health among older young people, may have worsened further.'

Tra-my said she hoped young people will know that they are never alone. "The more joy, kindness, encouragement, and

excitement that Flame can spread will help young people realise that they are never alone or should never be afraid of their faith," she said.

"If they are given responsibility and new opportunities within movements in the Church, and are recognised for their achievements, no matter how small they may be, they will be able to grow larger in their faith by wanting others to also experience what moved them from Flame themselves."

A range of speakers and musicians will be present from the UK and beyond, including One Hope Project, rap favourite Guvna B, youth worker Jenny Garzón Saavedra from the Colombian Amazon and Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB from Australia. World renowned speaker and leader Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle from the Philippines will also attend Flame.

The theme of Flame 2023 is inspired by the theme of this year's World Youth Day in Lisbon – "Mary

arose and went with haste" – and crystallises it into the theme: "Rise Up."

Flame said: "Rise up after the pandemic, rise up as young Catholics, rise up – as Mary did – for the surprising and beautiful adventure that is our Catholic faith." Flame hope that 10,000 young people will attend the event.

Tra-my's group will include "university students, young professionals, volunteers from our organisation and a confirmation group," and she hoped the event will be a great success.

"Although I am going as a group leader, it'll be my first-time attending Flame. I've heard so many wonderful comments about Flame from years gone by and am excited to have the chance to finally live the experience," she said.

"I am rooting for this event to be a great success because I am in so much awe and have complete faith that the team have something amazing in store for all the young people and group leaders alike."

Easter Gifts and St Patrick's Day Souvenirs

Universe Catholic Weekly readers' offers



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Easter Cards



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Easter Card pack – Blessings (Pack of 6)

Pack of 6 large Easter Cards. Gold foil, embossed, featuring floral designs and Easter Blessings message. Inside text: Design 1: 'To wish you peace and happiness at Easter.' Design 2: 'Wishing you every happiness at Easter'.

Ref: E0417 Price: £5.50

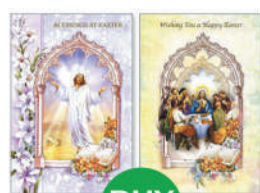
Easter Card pack – Christ

Pack of 12 small Easter Cards with Gold foil. Featuring 2 designs ft. Christ the Good Shepherd, and 1 with Christ knocking. Inside text: 'With Best Wishes at Easter'

Ref: E0121 Price: £3.95



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Easter Card pack – Last Supper/ Risen Christ (Pack of 6)

Pack of 6 large Easter Cards. Gold foil, embossed, featuring 2 designs: Risen Christ and Last Supper. Inside text: Design 1: 'God bless you at Easter and always'. Design 2: 'Wishing you every happiness at Easter'.

Ref: E0122 Price: £5.50



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Easter Card pack – Risen Christ (Pack of 6)

Pack of 6 large Easter Cards. Gold foil, embossed, featuring Risen Christ Designs. 'Easter Blessings/God Bless you at Easter' on front. Inside text: Design 1: 'God Bless you at Easter and always'. Design 2: 'This brings an Easter message with a very special prayer, that God will always bless you and keep you in his care'.

Ref: E0415 Price: £5.50

Greek wooden carved icon crucifix – 16 x 23 cm

Orthodox Icon Crucifix, with carved frame. Lithographic image of crucifixion on sturdy composite wood, with hand-painted detail, frame gilded with imitation gold-leaf with antiqued effect, with hook for wall hanging. Handmade in Greece, with certificate of authenticity on back. Size 16 x 23 cm (6.25 x 9 inches). See range on website

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ST PATRICK'S DAY



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Attractive card featuring St Patrick image. Inside text: 'To wish you peace and happiness as you celebrate this special day. Happy St. Patrick's day' On reverse, St Patrick's breastplate prayer. Gold embossed card, 7.5" x 4.25". Pack of six. Prayer on reverse: St. Patrick's Breastplate. Ref: E0210-6 Price: £6.50

Green St Patrick Rosary

Green St Patrick rosary beads. Metal St Patrick centre piece. Hand made in Italy. Strong wire, Celtic Cross crucifix. Shamrock imprint beads. Very tactile with smooth beads Supplied in Organza bag Ref: R6 Price: £28.95 (postage free)



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Irish Blessing Pewter Key Ring

Irish Blessing Pewter Key ring, with circular medallion, featuring Celtic Cross design on one side, and Irish Blessing on the reverse: 'May your troubles be less, your blessings be more, and nothing but happiness come through your door!' Ref: E0203 Price: £5.25



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In brief

New body to tighten oversight on curia work

As part of his recent overhaul of the Vicariate of Rome, Pope Francis has appointed six members to a new independent supervisory commission that will monitor the work and administrative and economic affairs of the vicariate.

The Vatican published the names of the new members and the guidelines of the commission on 15th February. The commissions will have supervisory authority over the Vicariate of Rome and all offices, agencies, entities and boards that depend on the vicariate or come under its responsibility.

The six members – all Italian – are appointed directly by the pope for a three-year term, which may be renewed only once. They include: Myriam Tinti, an Italian lawyer registered with the Vatican court and a professor of canon law at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University; Stefano Di Pinto, an Italian lawyer and professor of criminal law, specialising in forensic science, city safety and anti-mafia efforts; and Stefano Fiorini, an Italian accountant and auditor.

The other members are Daniele Fiore Di Vito, Luca Monteferrante, and Vito Pace, a notary.

The commission's work includes: verifying the proper running and administration of all offices and courts; examining budgets, final balances and reports on assets and finances; checking on compliance with employment regulations; overseeing the proper management of real estate property; and inspecting whether lease and rental contracts and agreements are handled correctly and transparently.

The independent supervisory commission and an office dedicated to safeguarding minors and vulnerable people were both established with the apostolic constitution, *In Ecclesiarum Communionem* (In the Communion of Churches).

In the document, the pope said he would like greater vigilance over financial management “so that it may be prudent and responsible and “conducted consistently with the purpose that justifies the Church's possession of goods.”

Vatican observers have suggested that the new group allows greater direct papal oversight on several departments “where previously the heads had greater autonomy for action, but not always for the benefit of the Church.”

Go beyond commandments and reach out to others - pope

Religious rules are good and necessary, but Jesus wants his disciples to go beyond the letter of the law and fully live out its meaning, Pope Francis said.

“The commandments that God has given us must not be locked up in the airless vaults of formal observance; otherwise, we are limited to an exterior, detached religiosity, servants of ‘God the master’ rather than children of ‘God the father,’” the pope said.

“Jesus wants this: not to have the idea of serving a God the master, but the father; and this is why it is necessary to go beyond the letter of God's commandments,” he said before praying the Angelus in St. Peter's Square.

The pope reflected on what Jesus meant when, in the day's Gospel reading (Mt 5:17-37), he told his disciples, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”

The pope said, “Jesus makes us understand that religious rules are necessary, they are good, but they are only the beginning: to fulfill them, it is necessary to go beyond the letter and live their meaning.”

For example, he said, when sacred scripture says, “Do not kill,” not committing homicide is not enough for Jesus if that person still harms others with words. “Do not commit adultery” is also “not enough if one then lives a

love tainted by duplicity and falsehood,” the pope added. “This is not fulfillment.”

To not kill, steal or violate the other commandments is “formal observance, which is satisfied with the bare minimum, whereas Jesus invites us to aspire to the maximum possible,” he said.

Jesus' message is clear, he said. “God loves us first, freely, taking the first step toward us, without us deserving it; and so we cannot celebrate his love without, in our turn, taking the first step toward reconciliation with those who have hurt us.”

“In this way there is fulfillment in God's eyes, otherwise external, purely

ritualistic observance is pointless, it becomes a pretense,” he said.

Pope Francis asked people to review how they live their faith: as a series of “calculations, formalism or a love story with God? Am I content merely with not doing harm, of keeping the ‘façade’ in good order or do I try to grow in love for God and others?”

Jesus showed the way “by giving his life on the cross and forgiving his murderers,” Pope Francis said, “and he entrusted to us the commandment most dear to him: that we love each other like he loved us.”

“This is the love that gives fulfillment to the law, to faith, to true life!” he said.

Vatican launches new eco guide for parishes

Carol Glatz

To help local parishes, schools, other groups and individuals reflect on the practical and concrete action they can take to help tackle today's environmental challenges, the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Stockholm Environment Institute have released a guidebook.

Titled, *Our Common Home: A Guide to Caring for our Living Planet*, the 20-page, full-colour guide connects scientific facts and figures on key environmental issues with reflections and teachings from Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, on *Care for Our Common Home*.

The guide “aims to empower local churches and local community efforts with inspiration, with introspection, with careful consideration of what has to change,” Cardinal Michael Czerny, the dicastery prefect, said, launching the guide this week.

The guide calls for urgent and immediate climate action and provides clear information, inspiration and tools essential for community based responses, he added.



It represents “an important and hopeful collaboration between two great sectors: that of science, and that of faith,” he said. “The call to protect, care and regenerate creation must be a priority for everyone, regardless of one's belonging to this or that religion or none at all.”

The booklet covers problems such as food waste, air pollution, water in-



security and biodiversity loss, offers spiritual reflection and suggests practical action to build a more sustainable future.

The joint initiative also encouraged people to join the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform, which helps Catholic institutions, communities and families implement the encyclical's teaching.

The platform's director, John Mundell, is a Catholic and an earth scientist and environmental engineer. Launched in November 2021, the platform now has nearly 7,000 participants, he said. Participants represent

***Our Common Home: A Guide to Caring for our Living Planet* is available from the vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Stockholm Environment Institute**

“more than 3,000 families and individuals, 150 dioceses and 385 parishes, 540 religious congregations and 700 religious communities, 1,050 educational institutions and 800 hospitals, healthcare agencies, businesses and organisations.”

Its ‘ground-up’ approach is inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical and has one clear goal, he said: “to inspire and empower everyone to take practical and concrete decisive action, here and now as we journey toward a better future together.”

The guide is available in English.

Resigning popes ‘won’t become a fashion’, Francis tells Jesuits in frank chat about his past and future

Pope Francis told Jesuits working in Congo that he had taken seriously the promise he and all Jesuits make to not seek offices of authority and power in the Church and, in fact, he twice declined becoming a bishop.

In the end he accepted his appointment as auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, because the nuncio presented him with a letter from the Jesuit superior general saying he could accept.

“When I made that vow, I meant it,” the pope said.

Pope Francis met with Jesuits in Congo and in South Sudan and responded to their questions during his

visit to the two countries, but the contents of their discussions were only released this week.

The pope said he had declined when asked to become bishop of San Miguel, and again when asked to become bishop of a diocese in Corrientes.

“The papal nuncio, to encourage me to accept, told me that there were the ruins of the Jesuit past there,” the pope told the Jesuits. “I replied that I did not want to be the guardian of ruins, and I refused.”

When he accepted the appointment to Buenos Aires, he said, he did so “in a spirit of obedience.”

Now that he is pope and makes

those appointments, Pope Francis said his preference is to choose someone who is not a Jesuit, but the greater good of the Church always prevails.

With the papal trip to Africa coming soon after the revelation that Pope Francis had long ago prepared a letter of resignation in case he became too ill or infirm to carry out the duties of the papacy, one of the Congolese Jesuits asked him if he really was planning on stepping down.

“Look,” he said, “it's true that I wrote my resignation two months after I was elected and delivered this letter to Cardinal (Tarcisio) Bertone. I don't know where this letter is. I did it in

case I had some health problem that would prevent me from exercising my ministry and was not fully conscious and able to resign.”

“However,” he added, “this does not at all mean that resigning popes should become, let's say, a ‘fashion,’ a normal thing.”

The late Pope Benedict XVI “had the courage to do it because he did not feel up to continuing because of his health,” the 86-year-old pope said, but at least for now, it is not “on my agenda.”

He added: “I believe that the pope's ministry is ‘ad vitam’ (for life). I see no reason why it should not be so.”



Swiss Guards observe proceedings as the pope conducts his general weekly meeting before a full house in the Vatican audience hall

Below, he blesses a child after the meeting



The path of the meek is the one for evangelising success

Justin McLellan

Christians are not called to “argue, counterattack and defend themselves” when evangelising, but to be meek and humble, Pope Francis said.

At this week’s general audience on Wednesday the pope continued his series of catechesis on evangelisation and apostolic zeal.

He said Christians often think “we will become relevant, numerous, prestigious and that the world will listen to and respect us if they evangelise forcefully.” But this will not work; instead Christ asks his followers to be “sheep among wolves”, protected by

God and marked by “meekness, innocence and dedication.”

Each Christian’s call to evangelise stems from a personal encounter with Christ just as the disciples had, Pope Francis explained.

“To evangelise does not mean going ‘blah, blah, blah’ and nothing more,” the pope said while waving his hand to convey a rambling speech. It requires “a passion that involves all of you: the mind, the heart, the hands, everything. The whole person.”

Addressing the disciples’ seemingly contradictory obligations to be close to Jesus and go out to share his mes-

sage, the pope said the two elements of discipleship go together, since “without mission the relationship with (Jesus) does not grow.”

Proclaiming the Gospel to others begins with having encountered Jesus, he said. One cannot share the light of Christ without first experiencing it.

But, the pope continued, “following Christ is not an inward-looking fact: without proclamation, without service, without mission, the relationship with him does not grow.”

“That is how you proclaim (the Gospel),” the pope said, “by showing Jesus more than talking about Jesus.”

Pope Francis also noted that in preaching the Gospel, “we often invite people to do something” rather than focus on communicating the Gospel’s “principal message” of God’s closeness to his people. He urged Christians to communicate “the reality of God”, as “the close, the tender, the merciful one” through their lives and actions.

And just as Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs or groups, Christians are not meant to be alone in their missions, he said; they should go forth together, relying on support from one another rather than on worldly attention or rewards.

Education is the light

Knowledge and enlightenment are needed especially where there is the darkness of hatred, which often stems from indifference, Pope Francis said. “Culture and education restore the memory of the past and shed light on the present,” he told a delegation from Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani University in Tbilisi, Georgia, during an audience at the Vatican.

The Catholic university was founded in 2001 by Bishop Pasotto, who was at the audience.

Pope Francis told the delegation that “Georgia’s history tells of so many transitions from darkness to light, because your country has always managed to get back up and shine, even when it has suffered foreign invasions and domination.”

Pope urges world to hear the voice of the sick

In a world that seems ever-determined to ignore the sick, even to the point of encouraging them to take their own lives, Pope Francis has demanded that society listens to those forced to live in pain and with illness.

“It is important to give voice to the unheard suffering of those who, in illness, are left alone, lacking financial and moral support, easily exposed to despair and loss of faith, as can happen to those with fibromyalgia and chronic pain,” the pope said during a meeting with representatives of the medical office of the Diocese of Rome’s health care ministry.

The meeting with health care professionals, chaplains and people who are sick was scheduled to coincide with the World Day of the Sick, which

the Catholic Church celebrates on 11th February, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.

The diocesan office and several Rome hospitals launched a programme in 2020 focused specifically on people with fibromyalgia and other ailments marked by chronic pain. In addition to a phone line patients can call just to discuss their problems with an expert, the programme pairs the patients with volunteers who can do their shopping or drive them to appointments.

In January, members of the Lazio FC team signed on to help bring public attention to the needs of people in constant pain.

Pope Francis told the group that Christians are called “to be close to

those who suffer, offering listening, love and acceptance. But to do this we must learn to see, in our brother’s or sister’s pain a ‘sign of precedence’, which deep in our hearts requires us to stop and does not allow us to go any further.”

“Walking together like this helps us all grasp the truest meaning of life, which is love,” he said.

Speaking directly to those at the audience who are sick, Pope Francis said that in frailty and when suffering is lived with faith “you are close to the heart of God,” so he asked them to pray “that closeness to those who suffer and a concrete commitment in charity may grow among us and that no cry of pain may go unheard any longer.”



The pope greets one of the young participants in an audience for members of the Italian Federation for Rare Diseases in the Apostolic Palace

Turkey 'quake death is new record as aid starts to reach worst-hit regions

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has confirmed that more than 41,000 people have died in Turkey, making it the deadliest such disaster since the country's founding 100 years ago.

While the death toll is almost certain to rise even further, many of the tens of thousands of survivors left homeless were still struggling to meet basic needs, such as finding shelter from the bitter cold.

The previous record death toll in Turkey was recorded in 1939 when around 33,000 people died in the massive Erzincan earthquake.

Mr Erdogan said 105,505 were injured as a result of the 6th February quake centred around Kahramanmaraş and its aftershocks.

Almost 3,700 deaths have been confirmed in neighbouring Syria, taking the combined toll in both countries to over 39,000. However, UN officials believe the Syrian Government is not releasing full details on its deaths.

The Turkish president, who has referred to the quakes as "the disaster of the century", said more than 13,000 people were still being treated in hospital. 47,000 buildings, which contained 211,000 residences, had either been destroyed or were so badly damaged as to require demolition.

"We will continue our work until we get our last citizen out of the destroyed buildings," Mr Erdogan said of ongoing rescue efforts.

Aid agencies and governments were stepping up efforts to bring help to devastated parts of Turkey and Syria.

The situation was particularly desperate in Syria, where the 12-year civil war continues to complicate relief efforts.

On Tuesday, the United Nations launched a \$397 million appeal to provide "desperately needed, life-saving relief for nearly five million Syrians" for three months.

It came a day after it announced a deal with Damascus to deliver UN aid through two more border crossings from Turkey to rebel-held areas of north-west Syria — but the needs remained enormous.

Ahmed Ismail Suleiman set up a shelter of blankets outside his damaged house in the town of Jinderis, one of the worst-hit communities in north-west Syria.

He was afraid to move his family back into a house that might not be structurally sound, so 18 people slept outside under the makeshift tent.



An earthquake survivor holding a child sits by a collapsed building in Hatay



Rubble surrounds the altar in a destroyed Catholic church in the aftermath of a deadly earthquake in Iskenderun, Turkey

"We sit but can't sleep lying down here," he said. "We are waiting for a proper tent."

Mahmoud Haffar, head of the town council, said residents have been able to scrounge up about 2,500 tents so far, but some 1,500 families still remain without shelter — as night-time tem-

peratures fall to around minus 4C.

"We are ... still hearing the question of when will aid get in," said Mr Haffar.

Offers of help — from rescue crews and doctors to generators and food — have come from around the world, but the needs remain immense after

the magnitude 7.8 quake and powerful aftershocks.

The quake affected 10 provinces in Turkey that are home to some 13.5 million people, as well as a large area in north-west Syria that is home to millions.

Much of the water system in the

quake-hit region is not working, and Turkey's health minister said samples from dozens of points of the system showed the water was unsuitable to drink.

In the Turkish port city of Iskenderun, displaced families have sheltered in train carriages since last week.

While many have left in recent days for nearby camps or other parts of Turkey, dozens of people were still living in the trains on Tuesday.

"The wagons have become our home," 50-year-old Nida Karahan told Anadolu Agency.

While a first Saudi aid plane, carrying 35 tons of food, landed in Syrian government-held Aleppo on Tuesday, getting aid to the country's rebel-held Idlib has been especially complicated.

Until Monday's deal between the UN and the Syrian government of President Bashar Assad, the global body had only been allowed to deliver aid to the area through a single border crossing with Turkey, or via government territory.

The newly opened crossings at Bab al-Salameh and Al Raee are to function for an initial period of three months.

Major humanitarian organisations welcomed the development but cautioned that logistical problems remain, even as the first UN aid convoy with 11 trucks entered north-western Syria through Bab al-Salameh on Tuesday.

"This is a constant back and forth in negotiations," said World Health Organisation spokesman Christian Lindmeier. "Every party has to agree to receive convoys."

Aid to reach Turkey and Syria includes some temporary accommodation donated by the Qatari Government which had previously been used to house supporters during the 2022 World Cup.

Miracle baby Aya at centre of attack on hospital director

A baby girl whose rescue from her earthquake-shattered home cheered the world has been at the centre of a sinister attack in the hospital where she is being cared for.

The little girl's entire close family were killed when the earthquake hit the northern Syrian town of

Jinderis, but miraculously, Aya — as she was named by hospital staff; it is Arabic for 'a sign from God' — was pulled out of the rubble by rescuers. The hospital's director said she was doing well, and would be looked after by him and his wife.

The welfare of Aya has been closely followed since her birth and

people from around the world have been offering to help her. However, on Monday an official saw a nurse photographing the little girl amid rumours he was plotting to kidnap her, for reasons unknown.

The hospital's director challenged the nurse and escorted him out of the hospital. However,

the nurse returned hours later accompanied by gunmen who beat up the director. The gunmen allegedly told local police officers protecting the girl that they were going after the director for firing their friend, and denied they were interested in kidnapping Aya.

Several people have previously

shown up falsely claiming to be Aya's relatives, prompting local policemen to guard her.

"Aya should be well enough to leave the hospital this week," her great-uncle, Saleh al-Badran, said. He said the baby's paternal aunt, who recently gave birth and survived the quake, will raise her.

A local resident gestures outside a residential building in Kramatorsk, Ukraine, which was destroyed by a Russian missile strike. The conflict marks its first anniversary next Friday

Photo: Vyacheslav Madiyevskyy



UN asks world to back \$5.6Bn appeal for people of Ukraine

The UN's humanitarian aid and refugee agencies have said they are seeking \$5.6 billion (£4.6 billion) to help millions of people in Ukraine and countries that have taken in fleeing Ukrainians in the wake of Russia's invasion of their country nearly a year ago.

The bulk of the joint appeal – \$3.9 billion (£3.2 billion) – is for the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which aims to help more than 11 million people by funnelling funds through more than 650 partner organisations.

Refugee agency UNHCR, meanwhile, is seeking \$1.7 billion (£1.4 bil-

lion) to help some 4.2 million refugees who have fled to 10 host countries in eastern and central Europe.

The joint appeal, one of the largest of its kind for a single country, could draw a large outpouring of funds from western countries, as a similar appeal did after the war began.

Such UN appeals rarely get fully funded.

"We were relatively well-funded last year," said Filippo Grandi, the UN high commissioner for refugees. "I think the refugee appeal was funded in excess of 70 per cent – not total, but quite good. We count on that to last."

The appeal comes as a string of crises around the world have stretched the generosity of wealthy donors.

"Of course, this is not the only crisis in the world," Mr Grandi added.

"There's many others that deserve – I'm just back from Ethiopia, Burundi. Who talks about Burundi? Sorry, but this is the reality and people need support as much as anywhere else."

The appeal from UNHCR does not cover Russia.

Its figures, which are largely drawn from numbers provided by national governments, show that more than 2.8 million refugees from Ukraine have been taken in by Russia.

Mr Grandi said Russia gets funds for those refugees "from other sources" – including un-earmarked funds.

"We stand ready to do more if it's needed for any Ukrainian that is in need in Russia," he said.

"That offer is on the table and is available."

The UN says humanitarian groups helped nearly 16 million people in Ukraine last year, including in areas not controlled by the Kyiv government.

More than one third of those received cash assistance, which can help prop up the battered national economy.

Defenders hold firm around key city as Russia gears up for major Spring offensive

Russian forces are still trying to punch through Ukraine's defences in eastern areas of the country, the Ukrainian General Staff said, as Moscow's invasion struggles to gain momentum almost a year after it began.

Russian artillery, drones and missiles have been relentlessly pounding Ukrainian-held eastern areas for months, indiscriminately hitting civilian targets and wreaking destruction, as the war largely slowed to a grinding stalemate in the winter.

Moscow is hungry for some battlefield success after months of setbacks.

With the one-year anniversary of Russia's war approaching, followed by improved spring weather, western officials and analysts say the fighting could be nearing a critical phase when both sides look to launch offensives.

The Kremlin is striving to secure eastern areas it illegally annexed last September – the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions – and where it claims its rule is welcomed.

Pro-Moscow separatists have controlled part of Donetsk and neighbouring Luhansk province since 2014.

"The enemy, trying to take full control of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, continues to focus his main efforts on conducting offensive operations in the Kupiansk, Lyman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Shakhtarsk areas," the Ukrainian military reported, referencing towns in the two provinces as well as on the eastern edge of the neighbouring Kharkiv region.

Amid the fighting, Ukrainian Red Cross volunteers are evacuating im-

mobile patients from Donetsk hospitals to medical trains operated by Doctors without Borders.

The trains take patients to safer regions of Ukraine.

The battles are draining weapons stockpiles on both sides.

Nato secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg warned earlier this week that Ukraine is using up ammunition far faster than its allies can provide it.

The UK Ministry of Defence said on Wednesday that Russia's military industrial output "is becoming a critical weakness".

Kyiv's continued defence of Bakhmut, a mining town that for months has been a key target of Russia's campaign in the east, has been "strategically sound" because it sapped Moscow's momentum, a US think

tank said. Its defence has "degraded significant Russian forces", including units from the Wagner Group, a Russian private military contractor, the Institute for the Study of War said late on Tuesday.

Some analysts had doubted the wisdom of Ukraine holding out in Bakhmut because it could hurt the chances of any spring offensive.

Meanwhile, support among the American public for providing Ukraine weaponry and direct economic assistance has waned, according to a poll from the Associated Press-NORC Centre for Public Affairs Research.

Forty-eight percent of those interviewed said they favour the US providing weapons to Ukraine. In May last year, 60 per cent of US adults backed sending Ukraine weapons.

Church sorrow after latest USA shooting

Catholic leaders in the state of Michigan have reacted with sorrow and frustration to the latest mass shooting in the USA, this time on the campus of Michigan State University.

Police reported a 43-year-old male suspect killed three people and injured at least five others on the East Lansing campus when he opened fire late on Monday night.

The suspect was later discovered dead off campus with an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound.

As news of the incident spread early the next morning, Lansing Bishop Earl A. Boyea said: "A dreadfully dark day in East Lansing. May the love of Almighty God restore health to the injured; sustain those caring for them; bestow solace on those who mourn and eternal rest to those who were killed. The Catholic community is praying that they rest in peace."

The shootings took place at Michigan State's Berkey Hall and nearby Student Union, two blocks south of St. John Catholic Church and Student Center, which serves university students, faculty and staff. No violence was reported at the parish itself.

According to a Facebook post, staff and priests from the parish have been on scene ministering to those affected since the shooting took place.

Report reveals extent of Portuguese abuse

A final report of the Independent Commission for the Study of Sexual Abuse of Children in the Catholic Church in Portugal revealed more than 4,800 children had been victims of clergy sexual abuse in the country from 1950 to 2022.

The president of the Portuguese bishops' conference, Bishop José Ornelas Carvalho of Leiria-Fatima, apologised to the victims and thanked the Church-sponsored commission for highlighting the abuse by Catholic clergy.

He also pledged that surviving perpetrators would be removed from office.

"Zero tolerance toward abuse has to be a reality throughout the Church – we will not tolerate abuses or abusers," Bishop Ornelas said. "This is an open wound that hurts and shames us, and we ask forgiveness from all the victims – those who courageously gave testimony, silent for so many years, and those still living with pain in the depths of their hearts."

The 500-page report called for a new institution to continue monitoring abuse in the Church, as well as for improved training protocols at Catholic seminaries.

However, it also warned that past Church responses had been "characterised by denial", and said no action had been taken to remove accused clergy in two-thirds of reported cases, leaving victims "in a situation of helplessness."

Bishop faces 26 years in jail after rejecting exile offer

David Agren

Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa has been sentenced by a Nicaraguan court to 26 years in prison – a day after the outspoken prelate defied President Daniel Ortega by refusing to go into exile.

Bishop Álvarez was found guilty of conspiracy to undermine national integrity and spreading false information after a secret trial in which he was denied a lawyer of his choosing. He was also stripped of his Nicaraguan citizenship and prohibited from holding elected office or public position.

The bishop was not present as Judge Octavio Rothschild delivered the decision over state-controlled media.

Bishop Álvarez has been a long-standing critic of the Ortega regime, and has repeatedly criticised its use of security forces to clamp down on protests as well as the levels of corruption associated with the regime.

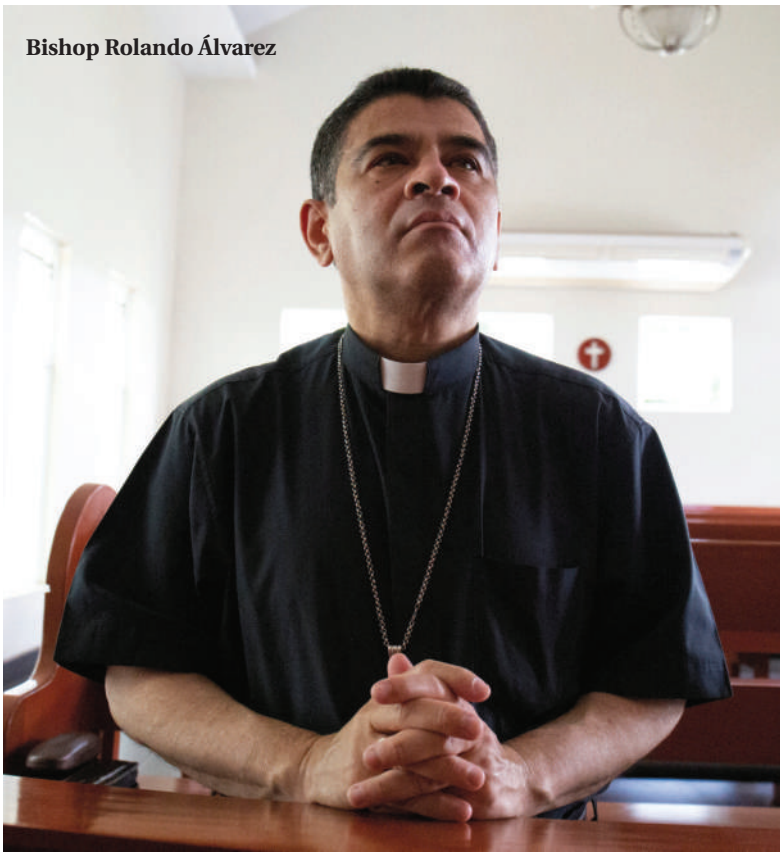
The day before the sentence was handed down President Ortega had called the bishop “deranged” and accused him of being “someone who considers himself leader of the Church in Nicaragua, the Church in Latin America.”

However, he offered Álvarez the chance to seek exile outside the country, saying he could board a flight carrying more than 200 political prisoners to the United States, but the offer was rejected.

Bishop Álvarez has been under house arrest for five months before being moved to a prison notorious for deplorable conditions.

Other members of the Church have attacked the sentence. “Irrational and uncontrollable hatred from the

Bishop Rolando Álvarez



Nicaraguan dictatorship toward Bishop Rolando Alvarez,” tweeted Auxiliary Bishop Silvio José Baez of Managua, who has been exiled in Miami. “Merciless vengeance against him. They have not withstood his moral stature and his prophetic coherence.”

“Rolando will be free. God will not abandon him,” Bishop Baez added. “Ortega and his regime sinks further each day in their fear and evil.”

Bishop Álvarez’s conviction follows the Ortega regime sending 222 political prisoners to the United States, including six clergymen also convicted of conspiracy and spreading false information (*see panel right*).

The sentence given to Bishop Álvarez was the harshest for an Ortega opponent since the Nicaraguan leader unleashed a crackdown on critics of his increasingly tyrannical regime.

Ortega has persecuted political opponents – arresting seven potential presidential candidates prior to his winning re-election in 2021, in a race the United States and European countries considered rigged. His regime has also extinguished the registrations of non-governmental groups, forced the closure of Church charities and educational projects, and suppressed independent media outlets.

The Nicaraguan Church has a complicated history with Ortega, who first claimed power in a 1979 revolution with the Sandinistas and returned to office in 2007, presenting himself as a proper Catholic – and was at that time supported by some in the Church hierarchy.

But soon after reclaiming power Church leaders clashed with Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo. When protests over a proposed social security reform erupted in 2018, parishes provided shelter for protesters and priests accompanied the families of political protesters.

“The Church has been a moral voice in supporting the defence of life and dignity,” a Nicaraguan priest, who wants to remain anonymous, told OSV News prior to Álvarez’s sentencing. “It opted for being a home or field hospital, as the pope says.”

He added that Bishop Álvarez, “is the most beloved and most respected bishop for his coherence and his commitment to the poor and neediest. He has been a clear and firm voice in defense of human dignity and, in his role as a pastor, he has been a prophetic voice in defence of the most vulnerable.”

Exiled bishop thanks God after over 200 freed to live in the USA

Exiled Nicaraguan Bishop Silvio Baez, Auxiliary Bishop of Managua, has given thanks to God for the safe arrival of over 200 political prisoners in Washington after they were allowed to leave by Nicaragua’s autocratic leader Daniel Ortega.

Among the group were five priests and a deacon who were arrested in autumn 2022 and had recently been given lengthy prison sentences by the state for opposing Ortega’s rule or standing with parishioners who had been falsely imprisoned.

“What has happened in Nicaragua, and all those released agree, has been a miracle,” said Bishop Baez, who has lived in exile in the USA since 2019.

“It has been the work of God, the power of the Church’s prayer. It is like the dawn of a new day and of a new historical stage of freedom and justice that is opening.”

Bishop Baez fled his homeland in 2018 after demonstrations against the Ortega-Murillo were met with extreme violence, leading to more than 300 deaths. At the time around 100,000 people were forced to flee Nicaragua under threat of arrest and imprisonment.

The bishop said he wanted “the world to turn its eyes to Nicaragua and boldly denounce the crimes of the tyrants, let us not remain silent, because there are silences that kill.”

The six churchmen and a diocesan communicator allowed to leave for a life in exile had been sentenced to up to 10 years in prison on conspiracy charges. The group was named as Fathers Ramiro Tijerino, José Luis Díaz and Sadiel Eugarríos; Deacon Raúl Antonio Vega; seminarians Darvin Leiva and Melkin Centeno; and cameraman Sergio Cárdenas, all from the Diocese of Matagalpa.

They were convicted in late January on charges of conspiracy to undermine national integrity and spreading false information.

They were sentenced on 6th February after a secret trial in which they were denied legal representation of their choosing.

“With this most recent sentence the regime was exposed committing crimes with impunity,” the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights said in a statement.

The seven men from Matagalpa were detained along with Bishop Rolando Álvarez (*see main story*) during an August 2022 raid on the diocesan headquarters.

Pope voices concern over fate of Álvarez

Pope Francis has expressed concern over news that Bishop Álvarez had been sentenced to 26 years in prison.

On Sunday, after praying the Angelus, the pope said he was “pained” by the news coming out of Nicaragua and recalled “with concern” the situation of Bishop Álvarez.

Pope Francis prayed for Mary’s intercession to open the hearts of the “responsible politicians and all citizens” to the pursuit of peace, which he said is achieved through the “patient exercise of dialogue.”

Bishop Álvarez played an important role in mediation efforts between the Nicaraguan government and protesters in 2018 following waves of civil unrest which killed more than 360 people. Ortega, who has been in power since 2007, has since accused the bishop and the Church of attempting to overthrow him.

In his comments the pope also

noted the 222 political prisoners deported from Nicaragua to the United States, a group which included five priests, a deacon, two seminarians and two media professionals employed by the Diocese of Matagalpa (*see panel right*).

Bishop Álvarez was on the list of deportees to be sent to the United States but refused to leave Nicaragua.

Those who did go to the United States were stripped of their Nicaraguan citizenship and were given a two-year humanitarian visa by the US government. Spain has offered to give them citizenship.

The bishop’s arrest followed other moves by the Ortega regime targeted at the Catholic Church, including expelling Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity and Archbishop Waldemar Stanislaw Sommertag, the former papal nuncio to Nicaragua, on false charges.



Bishop Silvio Baez speaks with Fr José Luis Díaz, one of the priests released by the Daniel Ortega regime. On the far right is another freed priest, Fr Benito Martínez Gamboa. The two concelebrated a Mass with Bishop Baez, on 12th February at St Agatha Parish in Miami, in thanksgiving for their release and that of 220 other prisoners

God kept the kick straight, says Chiefs' game winner

with a little help from his offensive line, admits devotee of Traditional Latin Mass!

The Kansas City Chiefs' player who won his side this year's American Football Super Bowl has spoken about how his faith – and a little help from his team mates – made sure his match-winning kick sailed through the posts.

Harrison Butker kicked a field goal – for non-American Football fans, that's roughly the same as kicking a penalty in rugby – in the dying seconds of last Sunday's match against the Philadelphia Eagles with the score tied at 35-all to claim the top prize in the American game.

The 27-year-old kicker is outspoken about his Catholic faith and is a keen advocate of Latin Mass. During the game he wore a brown scapular around his neck – a symbol from the Carmelite tradition that anyone can wear as a sign of their consecration to Mary.

He said afterwards that his winning kick was "all glory to God", though he did accept that part of its

success had been down to his "offensive line, who did a great job blocking... and it was a great snap, and great hold" so his kick was clean.

His faith – in God and his kicking style – had been put to the test earlier in the game when he missed a chance to put his side in front. Speaking about the missed kick after the game, Butker said he just focused on the next opportunity to score a field goal. "You got to get that out of your mind and just focus on the process and the next opportunity that you get."

"But I felt like as the game went on, I was hitting a better ball, a better rotation, and yeah, I was glad that last kick went through," he said.

Butker was already a big star for his team's fans after kicking a similar match-winning field goal in the previous round of matches to defeat the Cincinnati Bengals, this time with three seconds left.



Previously Butker has praised the Traditional Latin Mass, saying: "I think it really entices a lot of young people who are looking for answers. They're looking for happiness. And for me, I found happiness in embracing the faith offered in the Catholic Church."

"I felt like I wasn't able to embrace it until I saw it completely exposed in the light. I knew that I had discovered authentic Catholicism. And I found that at the Traditional Latin Mass, in the traditional sacraments, and I think a lot of

young people have found that as well," Butker said.

The kicker isn't the only player to discuss his overt Christian faith after the game. The Chiefs' star quarterback, Patrick Mahomes, who led his team to victory, also talked about the importance of his Christian faith at a news conference ahead of last Sunday's match.

"I know that I'm blessed to be in this position... and so to have a faith backing, I know why I'm here – and it's not about winning football games. It is about glorifying Him,"

Mahomes said. "I have no pressure when I step on that football field, because I know why I'm here."

Above, Harrison Butker (number 7) kicks the winning field goal with just seven seconds left to claim the Super Bowl for the Kansas City Chiefs.

For American Football fans, is that a hint of an illegal face mask hold on the Eagles' defensive man by one of Butker's team mates (top right of picture)...?

Oh brother, I've won



Kansas City Chiefs' tight end Travis Kelce and quarterback Patrick Mahomes celebrate with the Vince Lombardi Trophy after winning Super Bowl LVII. One of the big stories surrounding the game involved Kelce, who was up against his older brother, Jason – the first time brothers have faced each other in the Super Bowl
Photo: Brian Snyder, Reuters



Why do we take Holy Communion?

ANSWERING QUESTIONS BY YOUNGSTERS ABOUT CATHOLICISM CAN BE DAUNTING...

If they asked, could you answer questions such as:

- Why do we bless ourselves?
- Why do we say Amen?
- What's God's Grace?
- Why do we go to Confession – and Mass?
- What's Communion about?

and many, many more...

Could you answer them in an easy, effective way that a child can understand? Our website provides the information for you to be able to do this with confidence. Find out more at

www.catholicismrefreshernotes.co.uk

Once there you can print off a copy of this **FREE** booklet (right), *The Mass Explained for Young People*. It has clear, concise answers to all the questions above – and many more

Try it; it costs you nothing except a bit of your time.



HEART OF THE MATTER

JONATHAN LUXMOORE



Church leaders upbeat after key synodal assembly for Europe

Catholic delegates have praised the conciliatory atmosphere of debates on the Church's future direction at a continental assembly preparing Europe's recommendations for October's Rome Synod on Synodality.

"With so many cultural and liturgical differences, particularly between East and West, we won't achieve a complete consensus – but this very diversity gives Europe its distinctive voice within the Universal Church," Father Jan Nowotnik, mission director for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, said.

"If we wanted to, we could settle some of the hot questions facing the Church – over the abuse crisis, the role of women, same-sex unions or clerical celibacy. But that wouldn't settle them in the whole Body of Christ or necessarily bring the best solutions. So instead we've presented the issues, asking how we can be faithful to God while holding these things in tension."

The priest spoke after presenting a 22-page draft report to the assembly in Prague, attended in person or online by 590 delegates representing 39 bishops' conferences across the continent and including 44 guests from Church organisations and non-Catholic denominations.

He said Europe's Catholic dioceses had been given little time, following the coronavirus pandemic, to provide a "national synthesis" of concerns for the upcoming Synod, while also reaching agreement about the priorities of synodality.

Meanwhile, a bishop from the Netherlands said assembly participants had clearly enjoyed "coming together and sharing the richness of faith," despite contrasting backgrounds and circumstances.

"The natural law was addressed, as well as the existence of sin, while some groups talked about morality and changes in doctrine – but this was a sharing of opinions, not a clash of views," Bishop Johannes van den Hende of Rotterdam, who headed the Dutch delegation.

"When bishops' synods were instituted by Pope Paul VI in 1965, they were seen as events, whereas they're now viewed as a process," he said.

The assembly was followed by a meeting of conference presidents, who will consider the draft report and also prepare their own document.

In an opening homily, the Czech bishops' president, Archbishop Jan Graubner, urged participants to



"find courage to overcome the narrow European mentality" and reach out to the world's poorest, including those suffering in Ukraine and across Africa.

Meanwhile, Czech theologian Fr Tomas Halik told the opening session that the October Synod's task would be to "revive and deepen the dynamic character of Christianity," ensuring the Catholic church remained "a living organism, always open, transforming and evolving."

"The turn of Christianity towards synodality, the transformation of the church into a dynamic community of pilgrims can have an impact on the destiny of the whole human family," Halik said.

Preaching in Prague cathedral, the

Synod's Maltese secretary-general, Cardinal Mario Grech, urged Catholics not to view current debates as "a battle of conservatives against liberals" or "an opposition between West and East, North and South."

"The Synod is not there to destroy distinctions, to destroy the Catholic identity," Cardinal Grech added.

"The Church's unity can only be understood in relation to diversity, its holiness in relation to what is unholy, its universality in relation to what is particular. This is never a static relationship, but a dynamic one."

Bishop van den Hende said lay Catholics in countries like the Netherlands had welcomed the chance to be involved in the October

Synod, but added that it was important bishops' conference presidents would be able to discuss the assembly's final document before its release.

"The Church is a community embracing different tasks and responsibilities, and it's important the bishops, as contemporary apostles, can play a specific role," he said.

"The synodal process still only involves a part of our faithful – it isn't a mass event yet. But we must get used to more synodal activities."

Meanwhile, Fr Nowotnik said he was heartened that delegates from across Europe had "listened respectfully," despite the "potential for division," and said there had been "no bust-ups, heckling, snide remarks or boycotting of sessions."

He added that Catholics from Russia and Ukraine had sat together during debates, sharing "pain and agony" over current events, and said any "political tensions" had been overshadowed by the Church's peacemaking capacity on behalf of those suffering on both sides.

The Europe assembly is mirrored by parallel continental assemblies during February and March for Oceania, the Middle East, North America, Asia, Africa and Latin America, which will also submit final documents for incorporation in the Synod's working programme, or *instrumentum laboris*.

In Europe, Church leaders have voiced apprehension about the wide divergence of Catholic views from Portugal to Finland, as well as possible dominance of Germany's Catholic Church, which launched its own Synodal Way discussions in December 2019.

However, Father Nowotnik

stressed that differences over issues such as doctrinal consistency and the place of women in the Church had been "listened to respectfully" with "no battling in the room."

"But the Church in Europe seeks to be very clear about its mission in Christ. It's been said many times that unity can best be rediscovered by returning to the dignity conferred on us all by baptism," he said.

Each delegation presented a "national synthesis" of concerns to the assembly. Spain, headed by Cardinal Juan José Omella of Barcelona, prioritised challenges from secularization, poverty, social exclusion, immigration and those in different family, affective or sexual situations.

The French delegation, headed by Archbishop Eric de Moulins-Beaufort of Reims, urged a purification of all forms of deformation in spiritual life," and steps to include "the young, poor and excluded, people with disabilities, homosexuals, divorced and remarried."

It also warned of "strong remaining tensions" around the Catholic liturgy, and called for a "symphonic articulation of the different vocations within the Church."

The president of the Polish bishops' conference, Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki, believed that assembly speakers had highlighted the "weak spiritual condition" of contemporary people, and said he counted on the Church to "listen genuinely to the Holy Spirit" rather than "to its own voices and the voices of the world."

However, Germany's conference president, Bishop Georg Batzing of Limburg, said he regretted the Prague assembly had not included some of the "hundreds of thousands of victims of sexual abuse by clergy," while other German participants criticised a lack of focus of radical reform issues, including the ordination of women, and greater inclusion of LGBT people and remarried divorcees in Church life.

The head of Latvia's Catholics, Archbishop Zbignevs Stankevics, said some representatives had raised LGBT and women's issues "repeatedly like a mantra," but said there had been "less antagonism" at the Prague assembly than at previous bishops' synods on the family and youth in 2015 and 2018.

Father Novotnik said that in the assembly's final report "we're not looking for uniformity but unity, so there can be differences of approach in discourses and ways of thinking."



Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the synod, looks on as Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg, speaks to journalists. Cardinal Grech said 'the Church's unity can only be understood in relation to diversity...'

VATICAN LETTER

GREG BURKE



‘Slavery is happening everywhere – and the Church has to lead in tackling it

Human cruelty, at times, seems to know no boundaries. We see examples of depravity and wanton violence every day, whether it's the cavalier disregard for human life of the drug lords or the intentional killing of innocents by Islamic terrorists, or the sinister work of the Sicilian Mafia bosses, like dissolving a 12-year-old boy in a vat of acid.

We're all aware of Narcos, Islamic terrorists and Mafiosi, thanks to Netflix and the headlines in the paper, but rarely do we think about human traffickers and that's unfortunate. Why? Because those who traffic in human beings – for sexual purposes, for free labour or for their organs – make drug dealers look like gentlemen.

You might be tempted to think slavery is a problem in poor, far-away countries, and it is. But it's also happening in the wealthiest and most developed countries of the world, including the UK and the United States. Right here, right now.

Slavery didn't end in the United States with the Civil War and the 13th Amendment in 1865; it didn't stop with the work of Wilberforce 70 years earlier. Legal slavery ended. What continues to this day is people – most of them young women – being enslaved in massage parlors, nail salons and prostitution rings. Many are working to pay off massive debts they owe to the people who have tricked and trafficked them.

Runaway kids are particularly easy prey, getting picked up at bus stations and malls within days of having left home. Owning slaves is incredibly profitable, (even more so than dealing drugs) and quite difficult to prosecute, so traffickers are brazen in going about their business.

How to put an end to the problem? First of all, shine a light on it. When ordinary people realise what's going on, even in their own neighbourhoods, they'll take steps to stop it. See something, say something.

One way the Church shines a light is through the life of St. Josephine Bakhita, the patroness of victims of slavery and trafficking. St. Josephine was a Sudanese woman, abducted as a young girl in the late 1800s and forced into slavery. She was eventually brought to Italy and freed. She became a Christian and entered religious life with the Canossian Sisters.

St. Josephine bore the marks of slavery in her flesh, having been cut by one owner some 114 times. She was declared 'blessed' in 1992 and made a saint in the year 2000. Her story has helped Catholics be more



aware of what Pope Francis calls the "scourge" of trafficking and slavery. Last week, on 8th February, we celebrated the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita, the annual Church day of prayer and awareness against human trafficking.

Few things can destroy a person's dignity more than being owned by someone else, and being treated like an animal – or less than an animal. Frequently victims of trafficking are raped, drugged and beaten into submission. That doesn't happen to many animals.

Victims range from children not yet school age being used for online pornography, to Filipino maids enslaved in the wealthy Gulf states, to Mexican kids being trafficked for their organs and American runaways forced into prostitution.

Young men from poor countries in Southeast Asia also get tricked into working 20 hours a day for months on end on big fishing boats with no pay. Unfortunately, the ways to ensnare desperately poor people are almost limitless. Fortunately, there are thousands of religious sisters working to defend human dignity.

Although not many people are aware of it, religious sisters are the largest and most effective group

combating human trafficking worldwide. I got to see their incredible contribution through the Arise Foundation, a small NGO, but one punching well above its weight. Arise was founded in 2015, and helps frontline groups, especially networks of sisters, in fighting the root causes of slavery today. Those root causes are extreme poverty and unemployment.

While many religious sisters set up safe houses for trafficked women after they have been rescued, the focus of Arise is on prevention – tackling the problem at its roots. Awareness is only the start: education, skills training and job creation are also key.

Like much of the educational and health service the Church provides around the world, the amazing work of sisters to combat trafficking gets little media attention. They aren't looking for attention, but we should at least offer them our help. This quiet, generous and selfless effort probably deserves a Nobel Peace Prize, and certainly deserves our support and our prayers.

Greg Burke, a former Vatican spokesman, develops strategic partnerships for the anti-slavery charity Arise.



A tribute to St Josephine Bakhita, the patroness of victims of slavery and trafficking

TALKING POINT

DAVID STUPPLES

Just why do the Chinese want to fly across US in their beautiful balloons?

Spy balloons: modern technology has given these old-fashioned eyes in the sky a new lease of life

The US military has now shot down four high-altitude objects that had entered American and Canadian airspace, raising questions about their purpose and origin.

The first of these objects, a Chinese balloon, was downed by a fighter jet on 4th February. While China says it was for weather monitoring, US officials say it was being used for surveillance. A knowledge of technology in this area throws up some clues about what may have been going on.

The balloon is believed to have supported a signals intelligence collection payload, although this has yet to be confirmed. Debris has now been retrieved from US territorial waters off the coast of South Carolina and is being analysed by the CIA, which has confirmed it carried sensors capable of retrieving data from the ground below its sedate flightpath.

A further three objects were downed between 10th-12th February over Deadhorse in Alaska, near Yukon in Canada and over Lake Huron close to the US-Canada border.

Signals intelligence, or “sigint”, refers to electronic data, which could consist of conversations, written messages or data from weapons or radar systems. Sigint is normally collected by satellites, but can also be gathered from aircraft flying in international airspace.

Normally, satellites that collect sigint are positioned in low-Earth orbit (LEO) – say at 500 to 1,000km altitude – or at geostationary orbit, at the much higher altitude of 36,000km. Although the collection of this type of intelligence by satellites is efficient and reasonably effective, there are some limitations.

A satellite in LEO will complete an orbit around the Earth in 70 to 100 minutes but it will not pass the same point on the Earth again for 14 to 20 hours depending on its altitude. This is because our planet is also moving. Even then, it will only be visible to a point on Earth for a maximum of 20 minutes; which is called its “dwell time”. Increasing the number of satellites helps, but there will still be large time gaps in coverage.

In theory, a geostationary satellite could have a permanent dwell time. But, because it is positioned at around 36,000km from the Earth’s



surface, it could miss the collection of important but weak signals.

The US military has been developing signals – electronic data transmissions – with a low probability of intercept. This is making sigint collection by both Chinese and Russian spy satellites difficult. There will be large gaps in a 24-hour period when collection is not possible – a silent time.

China has attempted to close the gaps. In 2020, the country launched, to a 600km orbit, three new reconnaissance (spy) satellites from the Yaogan-30 series, as part of a wider network, or “constellation”, called Chuangxin-5 (CX-5), bringing

the number of satellites in the network to 21.

Steering ability

Enter the high-altitude “objects” that have been shot down over the US. Let’s take the balloon that was shot down on February 4. By tracing this object’s path over the US, it can be seen to have passed several highly sensitive defence installations, including silos for nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) in Montana, USA.

The balloon travelled across the US at an altitude of 20 to 30km and had the ability to steer in the upper

atmosphere jet streams. Clearly, the advantage for sigint collection was that its dwell time was likely to be several hours, and its closeness to the surface of the Earth ensured that it could, if it were spying, collect very weak signals.

Thus, a balloon that can remain undetected would be an ideal platform to augment the collection of sigint by both satellites and aircraft. Many countries have been employing balloons for intelligence gathering for at least 200 years, so the idea is not new and the advantages are well known.

Today’s technologies have given this method of intelligence collection a new lease of life, as we’ve also seen from the use of small aerial vehicles – or “micro drones”. Remaining undetected for a significant period is a key requirement to success. As to how this was possible in the US is an interesting question, given that the country has one of the best air defence systems anywhere.

One possible answer lies in the design of ground-based and airborne early warning system

(AEW) radars. To reduce clutter on the radar, objects that are static such as mountains and towers are removed from the radar returns by making use of a natural effect known as “Doppler shift”. When a train travels past you, the pitch of its whistle seems to change as it moves away from you. This is an everyday demonstration of the Doppler shift in sound waves.

The Doppler capability is common to all defence radars as they are focused on an aircraft and missile threat. A balloon or inflatable object, could be travelling at a velocity slower than the Doppler threshold and thus remain undetected.

Radar clutter

This shortfall in detection capability was recognised by NORAD (North American Air Defense Command) and radars have been reset to see very low velocity objects. However, the clutter will increase – perhaps fulfilling one of China’s aims to reduce the effectiveness of air defence radars.

A further difficulty with detection is the material used for balloons or objects. Plastics and synthetic inflation fabrics have no or very low radar reflectivity, thus adding another notch to their covert credentials. The balloon that started the current controversy in the US was first discovered visually and reported, rather than detected by air defence systems.

But the more recent discoveries over Canada and Alaska resulted from high-intensity surveillance. It has not yet been revealed what they are. Once that has been ascertained, the key question will be whether the objects were designed to penetrate the US defence system to gather better signals intelligence, or whether they were a test of US air defence systems.

It could, alternatively, be just a nuisance ploy. We shall know when the results of the balloon debris analysis are made known.

David Stupples is a Professor of Electrical and Electronic Engineering and Director of Electronic Warfare Research, City, University of London



The first Chinese surveillance balloon is destroyed by the US Air Force over the Atlantic



A balloon that can remain undetected would be an ideal platform to augment the collection of ‘sigint’ by both satellites and aircraft.

A VIEW FROM THE PEWS

MICHAEL CAINE,
ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, LYMM, CHESHIRE



The Sacrament of Reconciliation

God forgives us our sins when priests and bishops give absolution during the sacrament we call 'Reconciliation', 'Forgiveness' or Confession. The following is a simple explanation of it, during which we'll use the word Confession.

Confession is a magnificent gift from God, instituted by his Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ (John 20:19.23), who being one with God had every right to do so. It shows that our ever-merciful God wanted every man and woman to know that their sins had been forgiven.

We can pray earnestly and ask God to forgive our sins; go to Mass and take part eagerly and earnestly during which we ask for our sins to be forgiven, our ever-merciful God will probably have done so, but we can never be sure.

Only by going to Confession sincerely, can we be sure.

This sacrament is truly a unique magnificent gift. When we take part in a sincere manner, and are given ABSOLUTION, we know that God has forgiven us our sins.

We know that our existence here on earth is to prove to God that he should accept our souls to live with him for eternity when we die.

How many of us think about this with our busy lives and social media doing everything it can to make us forget.

Our so-called busy lives are finite, and so small when compared with eternity that we should never forget what waits for our souls when we die, which could be in the next minute or so, or not for a number of years.

Although Confession is a true and remarkable gift from God, many Catholics either ignore it, or can't be bothered to go to, yet it takes up so little time; is easy to go to and is so beneficial for our souls.

When people haven't been to confession for some time, it's usually because it's such a long time since they attended that they've forgotten what to say and do, or they're embarrassed to tell their priest some of the things they are ashamed of doing.

If it's a long time since you've been, the priest will know it's difficult for you and will be keen to help you make a good confession.

If you're ashamed of what you've done and are afraid of what the priest may think of you, go to one who doesn't know you, but go.

Priests and bishops know that cleansing your soul of sins is a great gift from God – 'The Joy in heaven over one repentant sinner.'

The following shows how simple and easy it is to go to Confession. It's in two parts:



1. Examining your conscience.
2. Actually going to Confession.

1. Examining your conscience.
We examine our conscience by praying sincerely and asking God to help us make a good confession. We then determine what mortal and venial sins we've committed and how many times for each since our last confession.

If it's been some time, it helps if you can determine how many times a day you commit each sin, and then multiply these by the number of days since your last confession. 'Examining our Conscience' shows we are sincere in our commitment.

Some sins to consider
To help us remember the sins we've committed before we actually go in to confession, this list of possibilities may help.

It's not a complete list: but ask yourself "Have I....?"

Taken the Lord's name in vain?
Kept holy the sabbath day?
Been to Mass on Sundays and

Holy Days?
Paid attention at Mass?
Made sure my children receive religious instruction?
Broken any solemn promises or vows?
Abused my body in any way?
Shown due respect to my parents?
Been angry with others?
Revengeful, Envious, Impatient, Lazy, Proud, Greedy
Had impure thoughts?
Willingly looked at impure pictures?
Been racial in any way?
Stolen any things?
Spoken about anyone behind their back?
Wished ill on anyone for any reason.
Plus any others you can think of.

When it's time to go to confession, you can either use the confessional, where the priest normally cannot see you, but can hear you, if there is one, or sit openly in front of the priest.

It's up to you.

Actually going to Confession
Go into the confessional, or sit in front of the priest, and then when you are ready to begin your confession:

- Bless yourself and then say how long it is since your last confession:

"Father forgive me for I have sinned, It's been (n) [days, weeks, months, years] since my last confession."

- If it's been a long time, the priest will know that it must have been difficult for you to come to this sacrament, so he'll be very happy to help you. (The joy in heaven over one repentant sinner).

- Tell the priest all the sins you've committed – both mortal and venial; and how many times. When you can remember no more, say to the priest something like:

"Father, for these and all my other sins which I cannot now remember I humbly beg your pardon, penance and absolution."

- Listen earnestly to any advice the priest gives; he'll want to help you. He'll now give you PENANCE to do after you leave; this is usually some prayers.

- After giving you penance to do, he'll ask you to make an Act of Contrition, and if necessary, help you with it.

An example is: 'O my God because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you, and by the help of your grace I will not sin again'

- The priest now absolves you from your sins.

- Bless yourself and thank the priest. You can now leave.

God has forgiven your sins and your soul is now in favour with God.

Go back into the church and thank God for allowing you to have had your sins forgiven.

Don't forget to do the penance that you have been give.

CREDO

FR HUGH DUFFY

The search for Christian unity

The prayer of Jesus after the last supper was that his followers be one, so that the world would know that His Father sent Him (John 17 : 20 – 21).

How manifest is that message of unity among Christians in the world of today? What do we see? A Church united or a Church divided? One thing is sure: the Lord wants us to be one, just as He and the Father are one.

The question is: How do we achieve this unity when there is so much division and animosity among Christians themselves and among Christian denominations? Can it be done? The answer, I believe, is yes.

It can be done if we follow the example of Christ to love one another as he has loved us. We can be united in the teaching of the gospel, and we can be united in our common cause of following the example of Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life.

Christian unity must be a top priority for every individual Christian. That is why St Paul urges the Christians of his day to “make every effort” to maintain “the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). When St Paul was writing, the Church was still one and undivided. Yet he admonished the Christians back then to do all in their power to work for unity in the body in Christ.



Progress: Pope Francis returns from his ecumenical trip to South Sudan, with the Rev. Iain Greenshields, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby

The situation today is far from the unity of the early Christians. The Church of Christ has suffered schisms upon schisms, divisions upon divisions, factions upon factions, with the result that anyone espousing “one flock, one shepherd” would appear to be dreaming an impossible dream. Still, that is what the Lord prayed for, and that is what

we are commanded to strive for so that all “will become one flock under one shepherd” (John 10:16).

We must all work together for Christian unity because we share so much in common. We should not be defined by our differences, but by what we have in common. Still, many Christians focus on their differences rather than on what they

possess in common as followers of Christ. This can lead to division rather than unity.

In the Catholic Church today, for example, two different and opposing factions are evident.

One faction may be described as ideologues; that is, those who espouse doctrinal fundamentalism or clarity of doctrine. There’s

nothing wrong with this, in itself, but there’s more to the gospel than insisting on clarity of doctrine. Jesus insists that the person who will enter his kingdom is the one “who hears my word and puts it into practice.”

The other faction stresses the pastoral; namely, it puts the emphasis on following the example of Christ who reached out with love and compassion to draw all people to himself.

There is no good reason why these two factions should be in conflict with one another when they have so much in common. We all share in one baptism, we profess the same gospel, we are powered by the same Holy Spirit, we are all children of the same God, and we are all called to follow the example of Jesus who is the fulfilment of God’s will for us on earth.

What we have in common is much greater than what divides us. With this in mind, we need to come together as Christians, not just Catholics, to share the love of Christ, and to spread this good news in a world waiting to be healed.

This is a very challenging task. The challenge facing every Christian today in regard to Christian unity is: do you have the will? Do you believe it is possible? If you take Jesus’ prayer for unity seriously in the Gospel of John, the answer is quite simply: yes.

Our Lady of the Vine: A lesson for Lent

Margaret Rose Realy

When we think of the sanctuary during Lent, we recall an environment deliberately rendered stark and barren – ornamentation and statuary are removed or in some parishes covered, no altar flowers are present, and it is devoid of any color except for the penitential purple.

The only plants allowed during this church season are greens such as ivy and ferns, and dried florals such as grasses, and those called the ‘immortelles’ – a group of flowers that maintain their beauty after ‘death’. Of the plants that can be used throughout Lent, the ivy connects especially well – it reminds us to cling to God. It symbolises fidelity of love, triumph and hope.

The Blessed Virgin Mary displayed these sentiments through her steadfastness as she faithfully cooperated with God’s plan.

There is a legend from the 15th century of a knight’s fidelity to

Our Blessed Mother and how Our Lady of the Vine shielded him. The account has it that this Christian knight of Viterbo, Italy, was defenceless when his enemies came upon him.

He knew of the miracles associated with a painting of Our Lady – attached to a tree by ivy – in a nearby forest, and so he fled to Mary’s image to seek protection. He later shared that wrapping his arms around the tree, clinging with hope that she would hide him from his pursuers, Mary rendered him unseen among the stems of the vines.

That was not the only great story attributed to this 1417 painting. Commissioned by Mastro Baptist Magnano Iuzzante, the large painted tile was attached to an oak tree on his property near a treacherous road. It was hoped that Our Lady would protect the townsfolk on their travels. Over time, a natural tabernacle grew from vines and their tendrils drawing the ivy up and around the mighty oak.



As years went by, goes the story, three times the tile had been removed and taken to a more secure place, and each time it was found the next morning, miraculously back on the tree.

Then, in 1467, the plague came to the region. It was recorded that some 30,000 people fled to the image and knelt beneath the oak, praying for deliverance from the disease. A few days later the plague miraculously ended and,

headed by their bishop, the people returned in gratitude for Our Lady’s intercession.

We read about ‘clinging as the ivy’ in the book of Sirach: ‘I bud forth delights like a vine’ (24:17). Here the clinging action is related to seeking Wisdom and the promise of a grounding in the Holy Spirit. In ancient texts, according to notes in the New American Bible Revised Edition, the verse continues: “Do not grow

Our Lady of the Ivy: ‘The ivy is a plant that secures itself upon almost any structure... it is a symbol of hope and the fidelity of love. An ivy always seeks to be upheld’

weary of striving with the Lord’s help, but cling to him, that he may reinforce you” (Sir 24:23).

The ivy is a plant that secures itself upon almost any structure. Because of this tendency to seek out and cling to support, it is a symbol of hope and the fidelity of love. An ivy always seeks to be upheld.

And what a beautiful reminder as we journey through Lent – that like Mary (and St. Joseph and all the saints), we cling to God with constancy and anticipation.

Finding footholds of faith – spreading tendrils of hope like a vine against a wall, anchored and secure in the presence of opposition – our lives flourish with grace. May we enter into a fruitful Lenten season, seeking out all the spiritual support we need.

• Margaret Rose Realy is a Benedictine Oblate and the author of *A Garden Catechism: 100 Plants in Christian Tradition and How to Grow Them* (OSV, 2022).

SUNDAY WORSHIP

ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS



The ultimate Christian ethic is one of active loving, not standing idly by

19th February 2023 – 7th Sunday,

(A)

We naturally resent those who do us wrong. But nurtured hatred can come between us and God, who wants us to be forgiving.

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

God calls each believer to love his neighbour as her/himself

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’

You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord.”

Responsorial: Psalm 102:1-4, 8, 10, 12-13

*R./: The Lord is kind and merciful
My soul, give thanks to the Lord,
all my being, bless his holy name.
My soul, give thanks to the Lord
and never forget all his blessings.
(R./)*

*It is he who forgives all your guilt,
who heals every one of your ills,
who redeems your life from the grave,
who crowns you with love and compassion. (R./)*

*The Lord is compassion and love,
slow to anger and rich in mercy.
He does not treat us according to our sins
nor repay us according to our faults. (R./)*

*As far as the east is from the west
so far does he remove our sins.
As a father has compassion on his sons,
the Lord has pity on those who fear him. (R./)*

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

The Church is the body of believers and the temple of God

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are.

Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” and

“

...so that you may be children of your Father in Heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”

again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”

So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

Gospel: Matthew 5:38-48

The ultimate ideal: Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect

Jesus said to his disciples, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

“Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in Heaven; for he makes his sun rise

on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?

Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

As your heavenly Father is perfect

Some like to portray God as an ever-vigilant watcher. With a warning finger raised the preachers would warn, “Wherever you are, God sees you.” They were echoing the feelings of Job who felt oppressed by the thought that God was judging his faults every moment. “Will you never take your eyes off me?” Job complained (Job 7:19). Perhaps they centred too much on warnings, with not enough practical encouragement to love our neighbour as ourselves.

“Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy,” says the first reading. Then it adds the principle of “an eye for an eye” which was not such a totally

barbaric practice as it seems at first sight. It was meant to help the people to exercise some restraint towards their defeated enemies. It became known as the Law of Retaliation and puts limits on the level of revenge that could be taken for an injury. Otherwise, unrestrained total war could spread throughout the world. If there are no limits to revenge, we could see the collapse of civilisation and everybody being killed. There is a breakdown of cohesion in some parts of our world, with the resulting instability and floods of refugees.

Even the earliest Christians could be quarrelsome, some siding with Paul and some with Apollos and so on. But those tensions, once healed, can sharpen the focus of a community. They led people back to prayer, to dialogue and a new kind of unity. “As the Lord has forgiven you,” St Paul says, “put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.”

Earlier thinkers before Jesus had stated the principle not to do to others what you would not have them do to you. That is perhaps the

basic law underlying all manners and politeness. But Jesus puts it more positively. We must actually DO things for others. There is the story of the man who appeared at the gate of Heaven asking for entry. When St Peter asked him why he should be let in the man answered: “my hands are clean.” “Yes,” answered Peter, “but they are empty!” The Christian ethic is one of active loving.

Mercy is the outstanding gift of God even of the “Old Testament God” whom many imagine as predominantly harsh and punitive. Our psalm emphasises that God is not a grim judge, seeking to condemn. Rather, “The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy.” Our Saving Lord is concerned only to remove our sins and to make us one with him.

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH FR DOYLE

Be comfortable in your journey of faith as you look to join this Church

Q. Lent starts next Wednesday, 22 February. I have always observed the fast and abstinence rules during Lent, but I now find myself in a weird situation. I have decided no longer to eat any animal products, so abstaining from meat on Fridays during Lent is no longer a sacrifice for me. Is there something else that I should do instead?

A. I am edified by your question; it shows that you have captured the spirit of Lent as a season of special penitence-with a particular focus on the Fridays, in order to unite ourselves with the suffering of Jesus on the cross.

Since, for you, abstinence from meat no longer represents a burden, you would do well to go beyond the specific regulations prescribed by law and adopt a discipline of your own choosing – perhaps by staying away from alcohol on Lenten Fridays, or by cutting back generally on food consumption during those days.

If your work situation allows it, how about simply taking five minutes at 3pm on Lenten Fridays to speak with Jesus quietly, thanking him for his sacrifice and love for you?

Q. According to a pamphlet I read at our parish, confession was not made obligatory until the Lateran Council in A.D. 1215. Since this was decided by man on earth and not by God, how can it be a serious sin if we don't go to confession at least once a year?

A. Indeed, the Lateran Council in 1215 did establish that Catholics should confess their sins at least once a year. But notice how that obligation is worded in the Church's Code of Canon Law (in No. 989): 'After having reached the age of discretion, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess faithfully his or her grave sins at least once a year.'

Notice that it says 'grave sins', and here I would use 'grave', 'serious' and 'mortal' interchangeably. So, technically, one only has to confess when conscious of a mortal sin-although I would certainly recommend regular confession even for venial sins, as a way to stay focused on the path to holiness. But beyond that, I think that I disagree with your major premise, which seems to be that only a direct oracle from God can determine what is objectively grave.

I don't remember Jesus ever using the specific words: "Missing Mass on Sunday is a serious sin." But I've always understood that it is a serious sin because Jesus did say:



"Do this in memory of me" and because I believe that the Church, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, has the right to establish basic teachings on faith and morals.

Q. I read recently that, during the consecration at Mass, the blessed Saviour is most present to us, and that if we have a special prayer request, that would be the best time to make it. Can you tell me if that is correct, or is there a more appropriate time?

A. It is true that when the words of consecration are pronounced by the priest, Jesus himself becomes present on the altar under the appearance of bread and wine. This makes that moment, of course, an especially sacred one. I have noticed that even when a congregation has seemed fidgety and distracted, a reverent hush descends at the time of consecration.

If you feel a particular closeness to Christ right then, by all means go ahead and make your request-although the primary focus at that moment should be gratitude to the Lord for coming so near.

Finally, I need to point out that, in listening to our needs, God has no office hours. I believe, and the teaching of the Church holds, that Jesus' invitation to "ask and you shall receive" applies in any circumstance and in every setting. He is always ready, and eager, to hear and answer our prayers-to show His love for us and for the

concerns of our hearts, which He shares.

As scripture says: "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust...from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him" (Psalm 103:13,17).

Our God is a God of love and compassion who longs to hear from us and answer our prayers.

Q. For the last four weekends, our parish priest has been doing a book study for the homily – not breaking open the word of God. On the feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, he talked about the book – not baptism – even though there was a baptism during Mass. Surely the purpose of the homily should be to explain how the scripture readings relate to our lives, rather than discussing a book on becoming a better Catholic?

A. I agree with you; but more important, you have the law on your side. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* says in No. 65 that the homily "should be an explanation of some aspect of the readings from sacred scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or the Proper of the Mass of the day and should take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners."

The purpose of the homily, then,

is to relate the biblical passages assigned for that day's Mass to the challenges that that particular congregation faces in daily living. One professor of homiletics – the quote is variously attributed – said that a priest should prepare his homily with the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other. To bypass the Scripture readings, especially for four Sundays, in order to speak instead about a different book – however worthwhile – seems hard to justify.

What the priest could do, though, is to use some of that book's themes and stories to illustrate the day's scriptures, and recommend that the congregation follow up by reading the book at home.

Q. As a non-Catholic Christian, I have been wondering for years if I should 'convert' to Catholicism. Spiritual things have always been of utmost importance to me, and the seeking of truth has been my life's purpose.

I have come to have a great respect for the Roman Catholic Church, and I believe Pope Francis is truly a man of God. I have come close several times to becoming a Catholic, but want to be sure it is the right thing for me to do. How can I know for certain that the Catholic Church is the one true Church? Is there anything that I can do (prayers, fasting, etc.) to get some kind of confirmation from God that the Catholic Church is the

'When the words of consecration are pronounced by the priest, Jesus himself becomes present on the altar under the appearance of bread and wine. This makes that moment especially sacred.'

true Church? How certain do I need to be before converting to Catholicism?

A. It strikes me that you are perhaps looking for more certainty than you need. The journey of faith does not normally produce the sort of mathematical certainty that results from a theorem in geometry. Faith comes essentially as a gift, and even the holiest of saints speak of an admixture of doubt woven into the fabric of their belief.

For you to become a Catholic, you need to be comfortable with the basic teachings of the Church. You need also the conviction that, for all its human frailties, the Catholic Church approximates most closely the faith community Jesus came to establish.

In my experience, believers from other Christian religions often feel attracted by the papacy-with the conviction that Jesus meant to give special authority to Peter as the leader of the apostles-and with a greater comfort from having a final arbiter of doctrine than from having 20,000 different Protestant denominations.

I think you should seek out a priest experienced in working with those who would like to become Catholics and sort out with him your feelings and misgivings. Most of all, continue to pray that the Lord will guide you in your search and lead you to inner peace. **Please note that this column does not accept reader inquiries or questions**

SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY

DAVID TORKINGTON



Self sacrifice and the Mass

Let me insist that what was called 'The Way' in the early Church is for all. At least it is for all who are able to love and be loved and who want to make this their vocation by following Christ. That means for everyone, no matter who they are, how little education they have received, or what weakness of mind, of heart, body or even what moral faults and failings they have been guilty of. This is because they have all been made in the image and likeness of the living and loving God.

St Peter was no intellectual but rather an ordinary working man who turned to fishing to support his family. Nor was he particularly outstanding for his holiness, at least to begin with.

The great spiritual secret

Do not forget that it was Peter who would become the rock upon which the Church was founded, who denied Christ three times shortly before his death on the Cross. St Paul spent his time persecuting, torturing and putting to death the first Christians before his conversion. Yet it was St Paul who was the first to put down in writing what is the great spiritual secret of the spiritual life, and that is that your weakness, even your moral weaknesses, can become your strength.

This is what it did for him and for St Peter, and the other apostles too, because God chooses the weak to confound the strong.

That is why I thank God for the dyslexia that I once thought was the curse of my life for I now know that it has been my greatest blessing. All that is needed is the humility to see and accept your weakness and to keep turning back to God, or in the words of St Peter, keep repenting. Once he repented for denying Christ, he spent the rest of his life repenting and calling on others to repent as he did on the first Pentecost Day. St Peter saw the time between Christ's first coming and his second coming as time for repentance.

Throughout this time our relationship with God involves continual and ongoing repentance that is only interrupted when God chooses to make his presence felt by profound experiences of contemplation that take a person out of themselves. When this happens we encounter God in experiences similar to that which St Paul experienced when he said that he had been taken up into the third heaven and into the Paradise that Christ promised to the good thief from the cross. St Teresa of Avila also refers to similar experiences by using words or expressions like Full Union, Rapture and Ecstasy. When these God-given moments of all-engrossing absorption into God take place, there are for the first time no



"...It was Peter who would become the rock upon which the Church was founded, who denied Christ three times shortly before his death on the Cross."

Peter denies Jesus, a Fresco in the Church of St Matthew, Stitar, Croatia.

together into an ever more vibrant and loving community that drew new converts in their thousands who could not but resist the powerful magnetic force of God's love, alive and loving in other human beings.

What happened then can and will happen again today if only those within the Church who have lost their way will listen to that single word uttered by St Peter on the first Pentecost day. Then, put what that word teaches us into practice every day of our lives, beginning now. For it is God's infinite loving that is the fruit of repentance that can alone unite us with Christ and the family that he founded on earth, for the greater glory of God in this world and in the next.

Who would believe it because it is so simple, but the truth of the matter is, love alone and the love that is learnt through continual repentance is the key to everything. It is our personal fulfillment, holiness, and happiness, and that of the Church and of the whole world for which Christ founded his Church. "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth that You have hidden these things, these spiritual truths from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to little children" (Matthew 11:25).

David Torkington's blogs, books, lectures and podcasts can be found at <https://www.davidtorkington.com/>

distractions or temptations and therefor no necessity to continue practising the repentance to which they will nevertheless soon have to return.

Into the image and likeness of God

The very essence of all prayer that we choose to use at every stage of our spiritual development, is then the continual process of repenting. It is precisely by turning to prayer that a person is able to keep relentlessly turning back to God. It is in the act of continually repenting that our hearts are strengthened and our love is purified. This enables the love for which we yearn more than any other, to descend into us, to begin and continue to remake and remould us into the image and likeness of God as he is embodied in the human body of Jesus Christ. Prayer becomes for a Christian what weight lifting becomes for an athlete. Every time we raise our hearts to God then the spiritual muscles of our hearts develop, enabling us to pray with ever greater intensity and efficiency so that our



Our relationship with God involves continual and ongoing repentance that is only interrupted when God chooses to make his presence felt...

hearts can expand to receive God's love in ever greater measure.

But not only that, something further gradually begins to happen.

Our hearts gradually become spiritual prisms that reflect and refract God's love into every part of our minds and our bodies, so that one day we will be able to say with St Paul, "I live, no it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me".

The School of Divine Love

In some forms of prayer like meditation, this weight lifting can become not only easy but even enjoyable, but in contemplation it can become more and more difficult. When we find ourselves in darkness and beleaguered with distractions and temptations, it is as if someone is putting ever greater weights onto the bar that we are trying to keep raising, and the continual temptation to give up becomes at times all but irresistible. Yet if we only know it, at times like these we are travelling more swiftly than ever before. Opening ourselves more fully than ever before, we are receiving more fully than ever before, the only love that is gradually changing us so that the impossible can become possible. Through the simple but ongoing acts of repentance practised in prayer, we can be made one with our Risen Lord, and through him with the Father who is our final destiny.

What is learnt in the school of divine love is put into practice outside of prayer too. Here the acts of self-sacrifice that are first learnt there become habits that enable us to continue loving God in others

with whom we live and work outside of prayer.

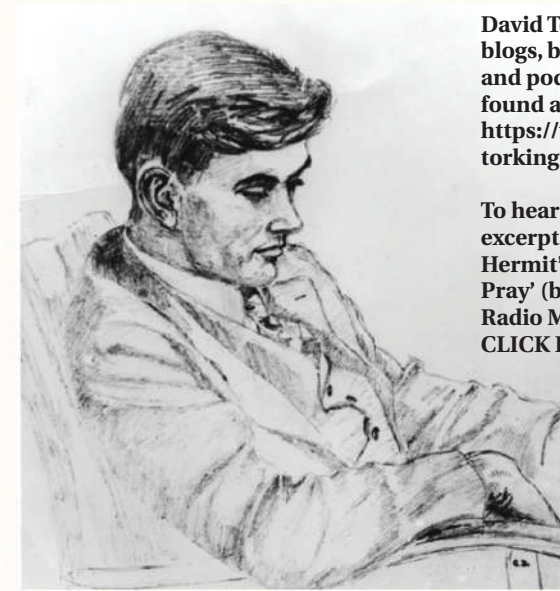
In this way, and without realising it, we gradually become the living, breathing embodiment of the man on whom we meditated at the beginning of our spiritual journey, and on whom we will meditate once more at the end of our purification.

Self-sacrifice and the Mass

When the first Christians came together for their weekly Mass, the spiritual self-offerings that they had made individually and personally, both inside and outside of prayer, were simultaneously offered to God as a community to receive his loving in return. This bonded them

David Torkington reads from The Hermit – Episode 1

by David Torkington | Jan 18, 2021 | Mystical Prayer, Podcast | 10 comments



David Torkington's blogs, books, lectures and podcasts can be found at <https://www.davidtorkington.com>

To hear David read excerpts from The Hermit' and 'How to Pray' (broadcast on Radio Maria England), [CLICK HERE](#)

Stunning mosaics of St Augustine added to Westminster's Chapel of St Paul

A new mosaic image has been installed in Westminster Cathedral depicting Saint Augustine of Hippo. It sits on the right side of the entrance to the Chapel of Saint Paul.

This great saint is seen seated beneath tabernacle-work supported on a semi-circular arch, a symbolic representation of the City of God, the subject of Augustine's most important work of Christian philosophy, *De Civitate Dei*.

On either side are the words 'Tolle Lege' ('Take up and read'), words heard by Augustine as a child's voice whose source could not be identified.

The text which it encouraged him to read was the Epistles of Saint Paul, hence the location of this mosaic at the entrance of this Chapel. The saint's emblem, a flaming heart pierced by arrows, is combine with a book, as is often found in images of the saint.

This new addition to the cathedral has been installed opposite a mosaic

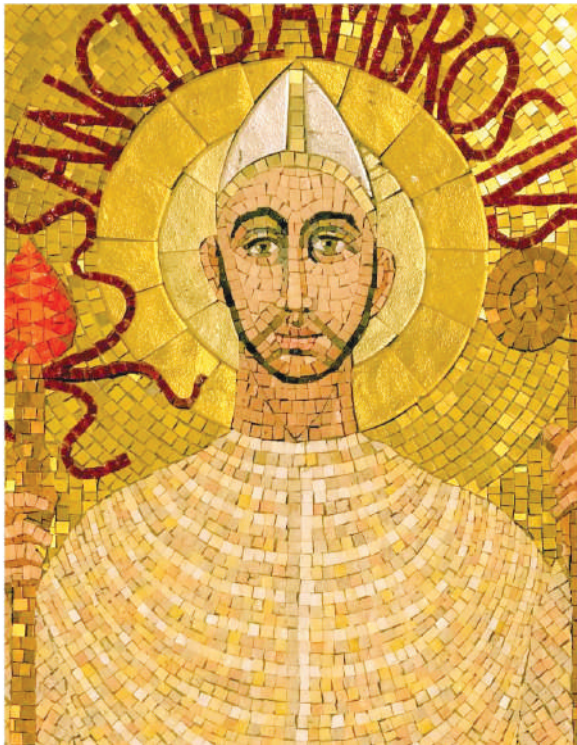
of Saint Ambrose, another great teacher on Paul's writings, and completes the decoration of all but one of the cathedral's side chapels.

The mosaic was designed by the artist, John Maddison. It is his first commission for Westminster Cathedral, but John has previously completed works for the cathedrals at Ely and St Albans.

Gary Bricknell of Mosaic Restoration in Daventry made the mosaic to the artist's designs using a variety of material including Venetian glass, as well as white, green and gold tesserae, so that it blends well with the rest of the Chapel's decoration.

The mosaic has been installed in memory of the late Canon Christopher Tuckwell, the former Westminster Cathedral Administrator, who died in 2020.

Photos: (left) Mosaic of St Augustine of Hippo; (right) St Ambrose
Photos: Mazur/cbcew.org.uk



Christian charity gets the message home to Wythenshawe pupils on No More Knives tour

Students from St. Paul's Catholic High School in Wythenshawe took part in some thought-provoking and extremely valuable sessions with The Message Trust's No More Knives tour.

Knife crime and its devastating impact is never far from the headlines. St. Paul's signed up to The Message Trust's No More Knives tour to show young people there is another way.

The Message Trust is a Christian charity working to improve the lives of young people in the UK and beyond through work in schools, prisons and communities.

Combining music with powerful stories and teaching, The Message Trust delivered sessions that equip young people with the skills and knowledge they need to say no to knives and start to discover their full value and identity.

The primary objective of The Message Trust's No More Knives tour is to educate children and young people on the consequences of knife crime. It hopes to enable young people to make informed choices, to encourage them to understand personal responsibility, and to embrace positive diversionary



alternatives, including recreational and vocational activity.

Sherilyn Hitchen from St. Paul's praised the day's content. "It is often the choices young people make during their formative years that decide the path they take through

life, and we want to ensure that they have the information they need to make proper informed decisions and that they can recognise and avoid exploitation and stay safe."

"The day provided some extremely valuable messages and

the students were left with a greater sense of personal power and with the knowledge and skills needed to recognize and survive the many challenges ahead of them."

Headteacher Alex Hren stressed the importance of the sessions. "The

No Knives crime sessions were designed to capture the attention of our students and ensure that they were fully engaged in the sessions," Mr Hren said. "We need to do everything we can to support and protect the next generation."

Fond farewell as Mgr Philip prepares for Southwark move

Bishop Peter Collins and Bishop Emeritus Alan Hopes joined Mgr. Philip Moger as he celebrated his last Mass as Rector of the National Catholic Shrine in Walsingham on Sunday 5th February. Mgr. Moger is preparing to take up his new role as Auxiliary Bishop-Elect for the Archdiocese of Southwark.

He came to Walsingham in September 2020, originally for five years, but this changed when Pope Francis decided last November to appoint him to the Archdiocese of Southwark.

"Leaving Our Lady's National Shrine to become a bishop wasn't part of my plans," Mgr. Philip said, "but then, doesn't Our Lady of Walsingham teach us always to be open to the new thing God might want us to do?"

"Of course, what God asked of her was unique, beyond compare, and of vital importance; but, doesn't God ask of us each day to do things – however small – to help

build his kingdom, and give glory to His name? None of us can say that we're too small or insignificant to play a part in God's plan. And if we don't, who will?"

Bishop Peter said: "I wish to express sincere gratitude to Mgr. Philip as he prepares to conclude his tenure as Rector of the Catholic National Shrine and Basilica of Our Lady in Walsingham.

"Mgr Moger has served as Rector for the past three years, moving to Walsingham from his home diocese of Leeds. Alongside his diocesan duties, Monsignor Moger has been a most faithful and talented servant of the Catholic Church in England and Wales for many years, contributing greatly on the national level to the liturgical and spiritual wellbeing of the Church.

"On behalf of the Diocese of East Anglia, I offer thanksgiving for the immense contribution of Mgr Moger to the ongoing development

of the National Shrine and its mission.

"We note, in particular, the recent decision to designate the celebration of Our Lady of Walsingham as a National Feast in England. Bishop-Elect Philip has ever been, and will ever be, a true and most caring Pastor of the Flock.

"While we are sad to see him leave the sacred precincts of Walsingham, we entrust him with great confidence into the realm of his future episcopal ministry.

"Our Holy Father Pope Francis, as Vicar of Christ, has chosen Fr Philip to assist Archbishop Wilson in the vineyard of South London and Kent.

"Now we offer Bishop-Elect Philip the firm assurance of our prayers during these days of transition, and we entrust his future ministry to the loving embrace of Our Lady of Walsingham."



On 10th February, Br Guy Consolmagno SJ, the Director of the Vatican Observatory, visited Stonyhurst for the blessing by Fr Tim Curtis SJ and the re-opening of Stonyhurst's own observatory.



Left to right above are Bishop Peter Collins, Bishop-Elect Philip Moger and Bishop Emeritus Alan Hopes at the final Mass. Photo by Norman Servais

Siân ready to lead key Caritas projects across Brentwood

Siân Thomas-Cullinan has been appointed as the first director of Caritas Diocese of Brentwood.

Fr Dominic Howarth said: "Our work in serving the poorest in our communities is a vital part of our Catholic life and mission," he said. "Siân was appointed as Caritas co-ordinator in January 2021, and you have seen the fruits of her work with Advent and Lent resources, support for parishioners housing Ukrainian refugees, work on Laudato Si', and much else besides."

Her previous roles have included working for the De La Salle brothers' youth retreat house



at St Cassian's, Kintbury, and she was co-chair of the national Environmental Leads network for England and Wales.

Siân said she felt "very privileged to be directing Caritas Brentwood and proud to be doing the work I'm doing. My own passion and enthusiasm for social action will help me with the role. Basically, I am a bridge between those in need and charities within the diocese."

Her role will include working with food banks and looking at the needs of the homeless across Essex and East London, and appealing for volunteers to help Calais Light in its work with refugees.



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About Newman Catholic College

Newman Catholic College is an inclusive 11-16 voluntary aided school located in Oldham, 10 minutes from Manchester city centre and the breath-taking Pennines. The school is situated in a modern building with state-of-the-art facilities and enjoys excellent transport links.

We were judged 'Good' by Ofsted in 2020. We are blessed to represent a 'close-knit', diverse and talented Catholic community that sees relationships with students and their families as integral to the success of every individual, as well as the belief that there are no limits to a child's potential, irrespective of background.

It is essential that you support the college vision of "Dignity and Excellence" by upholding the college's Catholic ethos and the fundamental belief that students must achieve their full learning potential. Saint John Henry Newman Catholic College is committed to safeguarding and protecting the wellbeing of children and young people and expects all staff to share their commitment. An enhanced DBS is required for all successful applicants

Closing Date: **12 noon, Monday 20th February 2023**

Interviews: **Friday 24th February 2023**

Please email completed applications to: Newmanhr@newmanrc.oldham.sch.uk

School address: Broadway, Chadderton, Oldham OL9 9QY

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Racial justice is the only way for Christ

A vibrant Mass to celebrate Racial Justice Sunday took place at a full St George's Cathedral on Sunday, 5th February, at which Archbishop Wilson was the Principal Celebrant.

He was joined by clergy and laity from across the Diocese of Southwark and in particular, members of the Southwark Commission for Racial Justice and Cultural Inclusion, which is led by Canon Victor Darlington.

During his homily, Archbishop Wilson called on all present to let "the light of Christ...shine out from within us," adding that "imperfect though we are, we must do everything we can to be the light and goodness of Christ in our world today."

"You are the light of the world! This, dear friends, is the heart of this Sunday's Gospel. We are to be the light of hope and the goodness of service to the praise of our Father in heaven. And the first question is: Do

we believe this? And the second question is: Will we live this?"

The archbishop underlined a key message that "there is no place for racism." "For so many people, across our global family of nations, and closer to home, even on our doorstep, discrimination casts its ugly shadow of hatred, prejudice and rejection," he said.

"On Racial Justice Sunday, let's be absolutely clear: there is no place for racism; not in our world, in our society, or in our Church. Bullying and victimisation, whether because of a person's race, culture, sexuality or belief, are simply not acceptable."

He underlined the message of Pope Francis that "Human dignity is the same for all human beings: when I trample on the dignity of another, I am trampling on my own," adding that God's love for each person is shown by God the Father sending Jesus.

"Dear friends, we believe an

unchanging truth: that every person, without exception, is created in God's image and likeness; that every person, without exception, deserves respect; that every person, without exception, has rights and responsibilities," he said.

He urged all present to be people of love and light, like Jesus, which will profoundly affect the world around them, following in the footsteps of US Catholic peace campaigner Dorothy Day.

"Such love is commanded of each of us. It has the quality of light. It scatters darkness and fear; it brightens and calls to life; it gives direction and warmth. It's a sure guide and a beacon of hope," he said.

"To love like the Lord Jesus, to radiate His light, means standing up



to injustice. It means defending the fundamental dignity of each person from the first moment of their conception to natural death. The great proponent of Catholic Social Teaching, Dorothy Day, once said: 'I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least.'

Archbishop Wilson ended by celebrating 'the ethnic and cultural diversity of people' in the Archdiocese of Southwark, and called all 'to shine with the light of Christ's love.'

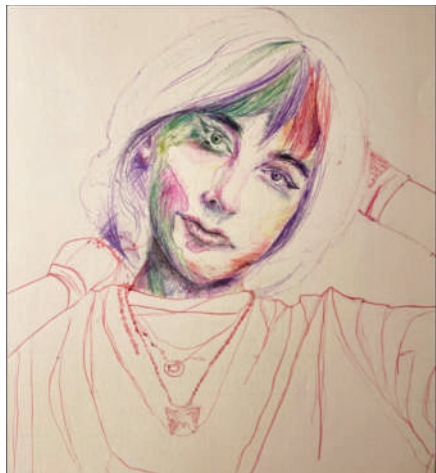
"Today, dear sisters and brothers, we announce again that there is no place for racism anywhere. The ethnic and cultural diversity of

people in the parishes and schools of our archdiocese is a blessing . Anyone who doesn't believe this must be reading a very different Gospel to me.

"Dear friends, individually and together, we shine brightest when we shine with the light of Christ's love. We shine brightest when we serve with the light of Christ's love, especially towards the weakest and the poorest.

"We shine brightest when the light we radiate also burns brightly in our hearts. One in Christ, in all our beautiful diversity, let us shine with Christ's love-light for everyone to see."

Archbishop Wilson addresses the service (far right) which attracted people from across the many cultures represented in Southwark (right and top right)



Stunning portrait earns Ivy extraordinary award

An artwork by Year 10 pupil Ivy Weeks-Pearson from St Richard's Catholic College, Bexhill, was chosen as a winner in the [Extra]Ordinary Portraits competition, with the winning piece displayed in a Holocaust Memorial Day exhibition at Westminster last month.

The event was organised by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust partnered with The Royal Drawing School.

Ivy's stunning piece focused on

the plight of Nika Shakarami, an Iranian 17-year-old who was arrested after taking part in protests over the death of Mahsa Amini at the hands of Iran's so-called 'morality police'.

Nika died in custody too, with the authorities claiming her death was called by a 'fall from a great height.'

[Extra]Ordinary Portraits featured artworks that reveal the 'extraordinary elements of seemingly ordinary people'.

Young people taking part were asked to create a portrait of someone affected by the Holocaust, genocide or identity-based persecution.

As part of her prize Ivy attended the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust's event at St John Smith Square's Concert Hall, Westminster, where she heard speakers including survivors of the Holocaust and genocide, as well as Archbishop Justin Welby and Tory minister Michael Gove.



Derry awards night is celebration of young faith in action

The 16th Annual Pope John Paul II Award Ceremony for the Diocese of Derry was held in Saint Eugene's Cathedral, Derry on Monday, 6th February.

The guest speaker, Melany Francisco-Lawless, alongside Bishop Donal McKeown, patron of the award, presented the award to 328 young people from all over the diocese of Derry and beyond. This year three people received the Papal Cross Award.

These young people came from 21 second level schools across the diocese. They represented 44 parishes within the diocese and 13 parishes outside of the diocese.

The guest speaker at the ceremony was Melany Francisco-Lawless from Youth Ministry Trust in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. Melany was incredibly inspiring, giving her own testimony and speaking of her call to work in youth ministry that stemmed from her being present at World Youth Day in Rome in the year 2000.

Melany encouraged the young people of Derry to continue their work and to see God's grace, through the good news of the Gospel.

The Pope John Paul II Award continues to be

the largest youth movement in the church in Ireland.

The Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre applauded all those receiving awards, saying the evening was "a wonderful celebration of young people and their faith in action."



Pictured are some of the groups of students who won awards, with Melany Francisco-Lawless and Bishop Donal McKeown.



Annual Day for Religious celebrates lives of service

On Saturday 4th February, St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham hosted the annual Day for Religious, at which religious brothers and sisters renewed their commitment to the service of Jesus Christ, Light of the World.

The Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Bernard Longley, with Fr Simon Bishop SJ delivering the homily.

Ten jubilarians were celebrated for their lives of service. The jubilarians met with Archbishop Bernard Longley ahead of the Mass, and after Mass Sr Gemma Simmonds gave an inspirational presentation about synodality and religious life.

2023 Jubilarians

DIAMOND JUBILEE

Sr Ruth Kidson, Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary
Sr Jean Shedden, Sisters of Charity of St

Paul the Apostle

Sr Margaret Murray, Sisters of Charity of St

Paul the Apostle

Sr Julian Burrows, Sisters of Charity of St

Paul the Apostle

Sr Jude Bogie, Sisters of Charity of St Paul

the Apostle

Sr Anita Duhig, Sisters of Charity of St Paul

the Apostle

GOLDEN JUBILEE

Sr Patricia Murphy, Sisters of Charity of St

Paul. The Apostle

Sr Jean Searson, Sisters of Charity of St

Paul the Apostle

SILVER JUBILEE

Sr Ermina Lucaci, Sisters of Charity of St

Paul the Apostle

Sr Alphonsa Muttungal, Daughters of St Francis De Sales



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St Edward's School Romsey is seeking to appoint a highly motivated and dynamic **Deputy Head Academic** starting in September 2023. St Edward's School is a day and residential school located in Hampshire, providing care and education for boys who experience social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

Relocation package: Contribution to relocation costs and a newly renovated three bedroom semi-detached house, set in substantial parkland on the edge of the New Forest and offered at a discounted rent, may be available for the successful candidate.

Contract: Permanent
Start date: 1st September 2023
Applications: To be submitted by **24th February**
Interviews: Week commencing **6th March**

As an established and innovative school, set in 200 acres of beautiful Hampshire countryside, there are fantastic opportunities for the right person.
The post would suit a practising Catholic who would oversee the mission and ethos of the school.

The role

The Deputy Head Academic will be accountable to the Headmaster and will work closely with him and the Deputy Head Pastoral to provide strategic leadership for the School. They will play a critical operational and organisational role in the efficient running of St Edward's, and work with the Deputy Head Pastoral and Assistant Heads in driving academic excellence and guiding the outstanding pastoral and enrichment provision so that everyone in the community can thrive and flourish.

About you

You will be highly organised, a strong communicator and effective problem solver, and positive in your approach to leadership. You will be collaborative and keen to build relationships across the school community and command the confidence of pupils, parents and colleagues, and model kindness and warmth in line with the school's Catholic ethos. In addition, you will be an excellent classroom practitioner and effectively engage with pupils and colleagues.

Benefits and Support

- Focus on staff well-being.
- Employee Assistance Programme (legal and tax advice, stress counselling and health information).
- Experienced staff team working together for the benefit of pupils. High staff retention has fostered a welcoming and cohesive community.
- Full induction package, supportive CPD and excellent career progression opportunities.
- Free lunch provided during term time.

- Free on-site parking.
- Positive teaching environment where the staff believe that it is possible for all pupils to develop and grow as learners and young people.
- Teachers' Pension Scheme TPS, including life insurance.
- Use of school facilities, including a Fitness Suite, Swimming Pool, Sports Hall and Multi-Purpose Games Area, outside of school hours.
- Very well-resourced, welcoming and supportive environment.

TO APPLY: See our website for an application pack and more details.
 CLICK HERE: <https://www.stedwardsschool.co.uk/job-opportunities>



HEALTH

Alzheimer's: blood biomarker may help identify the disease ten years before symptoms start

Caroline Graff & Charlotte Johansson

Though Alzheimer's disease affects more than 55 million people worldwide, there's still no cure for the condition – and treatment options are limited.

While recent advancements in the field have led to the development of two medications which may delay the progression of the disease, their benefits are debated. Not to mention that in most clinical trials looking at the effectiveness of these drugs, treatment only begins after symptoms arise. This means damage from the disease has already taken place.

It's thought that if treatment is started earlier – before symptoms begin – this may prevent the damage from happening. But the problem is the clinical symptoms that doctors look for to diagnose a patient with Alzheimer's disease only appear after neurodegeneration has taken place.

Our recent study argues for using a different biomarker than those currently used to diagnose Alzheimer's. We found that this biomarker, which can be detected in a person's blood, may allow the disease to be discovered up to ten years before symptoms start. This provides a window of opportunity for early treatment intervention.

Blood protein

Our study was performed using data from Swedish families who had a form of Alzheimer's disease caused by genetic mutations. While autosomal dominant Alzheimer's disease (ADAD) has similar symptoms to sporadic Alzheimer's disease (the most common form of Alzheimer's, which is a combination of genetic, lifestyle and environmental factors), symptoms happen much earlier – typically in a person's 40s or 50s.

Since the mutation is inherited, if a parent has ADAD their child will have a 50 per cent chance of inheriting the mutation. Although less than 1 per cent of all people with Alzheimer's disease have

this form, research studies in these families provide valuable information on how Alzheimer's disease progresses in general.

Our study looked at 75 people from three different families who all had a history of ADAD. Participants provided 164 blood samples in total, all collected between 1994 and 2018. The levels for four different blood-based biomarkers with known links to Alzheimer's disease were analysed. We also performed other tests to look for signs of the disease, such as MRI imaging and cognitive tests.

Our main finding was that levels of one particular protein, called GFAP, increased before other known disease-associated blood-based biomarkers analysed in the

study. This increase had already begun ten years prior to the first noticeable signs of Alzheimer's disease.

GFAP is a protein released by the brain's astrocytes – specialised cells that take part in the brain's immune system, among other functions. While we know that GFAP is involved in the brain's immune system processes, we don't know its exact function. In studies on other forms of Alzheimer's disease, GFAP has been suggested to mirror the activity of brain inflammation. It's also associated with the presence of amyloid plaques – a hallmark of Alzheimer's disease.

Our results are in line with other recent studies on genetic forms of Alzheimer's, which have shown higher GFAP levels

before disease onset.

Research has also shown that GFAP levels are higher in people with preclinical Alzheimer's disease without a genetic cause, who have other signs of Alzheimer's pathology (such as amyloid plaques) but aren't yet exhibiting symptoms. This suggests that our findings may also apply to the more common, sporadic forms of Alzheimer's disease.

The results of our study are also important for supporting our general understanding of Alzheimer's disease – particularly the early disease processes in the brain. Together with other recent findings, it's clear that further investigation is needed to understand

more about GFAP and its function in the brain – including in the progression of Alzheimer's disease.

Perhaps future treatments for Alzheimer's disease will be more successful if they seek to target both the brain's astrocytes and other common hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease – such as the accumulation of the beta-amyloid in the brain.

Caroline Graff is a Professor of Genetic Dementia Research, Karolinska Institutet

Charlotte Johansson is a PhD researcher, Neuropathology of Alzheimer's, Karolinska Institutet



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GARDENING

Succulent plants: The different types and how to help them grow

Succulents are a group of plants with some of the most diverse forms, colours, and blooms, but which many people label, incorrectly, under a very different word: cacti. They are popular not only because they are attractive but they are also easy to care for both indoors and outdoors and don't take up much space, which makes them a dream for the busy gardener.

Read on for some fun succulent plant info so you can get started collecting the myriad of varieties available in this special class of plant...

What is a succulent plant?

Succulents are specialised plants that store water in their leaves and/or stems. They are remarkably adapted to harsh climates where water is scarce or comes sporadically. Merriam Webster defines a succulent as 'full of juice' or 'juicy'.

What is a Succulent?

Oddly, some botanists and horticultural experts differ on which plants are technically succulents. Their appearance differs from species to species, but one common characteristic is swollen leaves, pads, or stems. The exact classification of a certain plant will have to go to the experts, but whatever the case, all types of succulents or those that appear to be succulents are pleasing to the eye, minimal regarding care and produce delightful little surprises during their life cycle.

Again, referring to the dictionary, a succulent plant has thick stems or leaves that store water. This unique adaptation allows the plant to survive in low moisture regions of the world.

Succulents are often thought to be native only to arid regions, such as deserts, but they also belong in forest settings, high alpine regions, coasts, and dry tropical areas.

There are over 50 families that are classed as succulents. There are both xerophytic succulents that thrive in dry areas and halophytic types which live in boggy saline soil. The xerophytic succulents are the best known form and are widely available as house or garden plants.

Succulent plant info

While most types of succulents require warm temperatures, moderately dry, well-draining soil and sunlight, some can withstand cooler or even downright cold temperatures. These hardy succulents are able to withstand brief freezes and fend off frost damage. Occasionally, cold snaps will force a plant into dormancy, but well established hardy types will spring back when warm weather returns. It is important to know if your succulent is a tropical or hardy variety in instances where it is planted outdoors.

One of the main succulent plant characteristics is thick, fleshy leaves or pads but there are also non-succulent leaved varieties. This is why botanists and other experts disagree on some plant's classification.

The succulent vs. cactus question is often debated even among professional growers. This is because cacti produce the fleshy leaves but lack other characteristics familiar to the family. In actuality, a cactus is indeed a succulent

due to the trait of harnessing and storing water shared by all species in the group. That said, a succulent is not considered a cactus.

Succulent plant types
If swollen leaves and stems are the main succulent plant characteristics

“One of the main succulent plant characteristics is thick, fleshy leaves or pads but there are also non-succulent leaved varieties. This is why botanists and other experts disagree on some plant’s classification – and that’s where the succulent vs. cactus question, which is often debated even among professional growers, stems from...”

visible, there are also other qualities which delineate the group. Shallow roots are one adaptation shared among the

succulents. A few varieties have deeper tap roots but the majority has wide, surface root zones that allow maximum moisture capture when infrequent rains occur.

Some of the succulent plant types commonly available are: Agaves; Yucca; Aloe; Cacti; Bromeliad; Sedum; Sempervivum; Echeveria; Various euphorbias; and some types of orchids

It is important to note their hardiness range, but many of these can thrive in the garden. Smaller succulents make varied and fascinating container displays for the indoors. Almost all species need at least eight hours of light, warm daytime temperatures, consistent water during the growing season and well-drained soil.



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LIFESTYLE

Top 10 winter cleaning tips:

Give your home a glorious pre-Spring glow

This is a great time to bring back order and cleanliness to your home and tick off some home maintenance chores you may have neglected last year.

Not sure where to start? Check out these top cleaning tips that will whip your house into shape and turn it into a clean and tidy abode.

1. Reduce clutter

When you get home from a long day at work, you want your environment to be tidy to help you relax. An easy way to keep things tidy is to make sure everything has a place so you can quickly put away items and maintain a neat and calming environment. Bins, baskets and other organisational items can make it simple to get into the habit of putting things away so you can capture clutter before it starts.

2. Deep clean the floors

Your floors accumulate dirt, dust and crumbs from everyday use, especially high-traffic areas like the main entrance, kitchen, living room and bathroom. In using tools like the Casabella Infuse mop and Casabella ToughSweep broom, you can quickly deep clean linoleum, laminate, vinyl and sealed hardwood flooring to keep messes at bay. The spray mop comes with a reusable microfiber mopping pad that is safe to use on most flooring, while the broom's angled bristles can help you tackle tough corners.

3. Unclog the dryer vent

How often do you clean your dryer vent? If you have to run the dryer twice to fully dry laundry, it's time to unclog. To start, you'll need to disconnect the dryer and clear away any lint from the vent pipe, wall piping and dryer opening. Plus,



you'll want to make sure to remove and clean the vent cover on the outside of your home.

4. Dust easy and hard-to-reach areas

Easy-to-reach areas, like windowsills, shelves and picture frames, should be thoroughly dusted once a month. With hard-to-reach places, like high shelves, ceiling fans and books, you can go up to three months between dustings.

To make dusting easier, use a tool like the Casabella Extendable Microfiber

Duster, which extends up to 35 inches to easily clean hard-to-reach spaces.

5. Clean every crevice of the kitchen

There are crevices and tight spaces in your kitchen that can quickly collect dust and grime, but since they're out of sight, they're also out of mind. Move appliances to clean under and behind them. For example, the space under and behind the fridge is a magnet for hair, crumbs and dust, so make sure to add this space to the must-clean list.

6. Freshen up the furniture

Your upholstered furniture attracts and traps dirt, dust and hair. To keep your furniture in good condition and clean, you'll want to regularly vacuum the back, armrests, cushions and underneath the cushions.

It's also a good idea to top off your clean with the Evercare All Purpose Lint Roller, which effortlessly removes lint from couches, clothing, curtain and lampshades, making it the ultimate addition to your cleaning kit.

7. Clean and degrease the oven

If it's been a while since you've cleaned your oven, you should give it a deep clean after you've finished your cooking. Make sure to wipe the bottom and sides of the oven and give the racks a thorough wash. If you have stubborn, burnt-on food, you may need to buy a cleaner and some elbow grease to get it sparkling.

8. Don't forget the doors and trim

Doors and trim can accumulate a lot of dust and grime. Make sure to take a damp cloth and wipe it down from top to bottom and don't forget the sides and trim or molding! Using a disinfectant to eliminate bacteria and germs on your doorknobs from frequent, daily touching is also a good idea, particularly during the winter months.

9. Vacuum Rugs

Rugs collect soil and dust that can quickly make them look dingy, while also putting them at risk of damaging the fibres. People tend to bring in a lot of slush and dirt from outdoors, so be sure to vacuum your rugs thoroughly. Vacuum rugs at least once a week, especially those in high-traffic areas.

10. Check and change your air filters

To ensure you're breathing in clean air, and that your HVAC unit operates smoothly and efficiently, check your air filters every three months and change them as needed. According to experts, you can inspect an air filter by holding it up to the light. If the light doesn't pass through, the filter is clogged and needs to be changed.

Create a spotless, neat environment you'll be happy to come home to every day.

CINEMA

Cabin isn't the end of the world... but it's close

It may be the end of the world as we know it in *Knock at the Cabin* (Universal). But, unlike R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe, no one in this offbeat but effective thriller feels fine. Neither will any viewer who comes to the film without the mature discernment needed to sort through its ethically complex content.

The difficulties raised on that score are at least somewhat mitigated, however, by the degree to which the movie departs, from its premise onward, from anything resembling everyday life. Instead, working from Paul Tremblay's bestseller *The Cabin at the End of the World*, director and co-writer M. Night Shyamalan takes us, quite promptly, to the Twilight Zone.

Vacationing couple Eric (Jonathan Groff) and Andrew (Ben Aldridge) find the country idyll they've been sharing with their adopted daughter Wen (Kristen Cui)



Hulking but seemingly gentle Leonard (Dave Bautista) and his friends don't think the world has much longer to live....

at the remote dwelling of the title more than rudely interrupted when they're taken hostage by a quartet of intruders. But this, it soon turns out, is no ordinary home invasion.

As the group's leader, hulking but seemingly gentle Leonard (Dave Bautista), explains, all four of the interlopers have had matching visions of the impending apocalypse. It's also been

revealed to them that this cataclysm can only be averted if one of their captives is selected by the others to be killed in sacrifice.

As the initially incredulous adult duo try to protect themselves and Wen, TV news bulletins confront them with mounting evidence of worldwide disasters unfolding in rapid succession. They discover as well that they're captors are neither habitual criminals nor cultists. Leonard, for example, is a teacher and coach.

Could the strangers, in fact, be telling the truth?

Shyamalan builds up the emotional tension, partly through the use of intense close-ups. He also elicits forceful performances that help make the fantastic nature of his main characters' quandary more believable.

As will already be apparent, however,

the revelations mentioned in the script Shyamalan penned with Steve Desmond and Michael Sherman diverge significantly from Biblical prophecy. And, of course, the behaviour undertaken in response to them would in any normal circumstances be deeply immoral.

With all that going on, the narrative's endorsement of the central relationship feels fleeting. But it's also distinct.

Surveying all these taxing elements, it's clear that the fitting audience for this eccentric yarn is a scanty one. It certainly does not include youngsters or those grown-ups in search of a mild diversion.

The film contains discreetly handled but harsh violence with some gore, suicide, a benign view of homosexual acts, a few profanities, several milder oaths, frequent rough language and about a half-dozen crude terms.

It's rated as a 15 in the UK

FOOD

CLASSIC STEAK DIANE

A classic dish using the best cut of steak to create a traditional and tasty classic dish. Who doesn't like a juicy steak? They are suitable for any occasion and ideal as a dinner party dish.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 (100g) fillet steaks
- 300ml beef stock
- 100g mushrooms, torn into small pieces
- 70ml cognac or brandy
- 70ml double cream
- 1 tbsp unsalted butter
- 2 cloves of garlic, crushed
- 1 shallot, chopped
- 2 tsp vegetable oil
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- ¼ tsp hot sauce, such as Tabasco
- 1 tsp chopped parsley
- 1 tsp chopped chives
- salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

METHOD

1. Heat the oil in a frying pan over medium-high heat.
2. Season the steaks with salt and pepper and add to the pan; cook, turning once, until browned on both sides and cooked to taste, about four or five minutes for medium-rare.
3. Transfer steaks to a plate, and set aside but keep warm – though not hot, as it will dry them out.
4. Return pan to high heat, and add stock; cook until reduced by about a half, which should take ten minutes. Pour into a bowl, and set aside.
5. Put the pan back on the heat and add butter, garlic and the shallots and cook, stirring, until soft, for about two minutes. Add mushrooms and cook, stirring, until they begin to brown.
6. Add cognac, and light with a match to flambée; cook until flame dies down.
7. Stir in the reserved stock, cream, Dijon,



Worcestershire, and hot sauce, and then return steaks to pan and cook until warmed through and the sauce is thickened.

8. Transfer steak to serving plates and stir parsley and chives into sauce; pour sauce over steaks to serve.

REDCURRANT MERINGUE PIE

And now for something (almost) completely different. A twist on the lemon version, the combination of redcurrants and hazelnuts makes for something original and unique. Why not create a surprise dish which is luscious to the taste and easy on the eye? Moreover, it's delicious served with cream or ice cream.

INGREDIENTS

- Base:
- 2 egg yolks
 - 250g plain flour
 - 125g butter, softened
 - 100g caster sugar
 - 1 teaspoon baking powder

Filling and topping:

- 4 egg whites
- 500g redcurrants
- 150g caster sugar
- 150g ground hazelnuts

METHOD

1. In a large bowl, combine flour, baking powder, 100g caster sugar, butter and egg yolks. Knead together until well combined. Wrap in cling film and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.
2. Preheat the oven to 200°C.

3. Grease a 26cm cake tin then roll out the chilled dough on a floured surface to roughly the same diameter as the tin. Transfer to the tin and press to even out along the bottom and a little up the sides.
4. Beat egg whites to stiff peaks. Gradually beat in 150g sugar. Add the ground hazelnuts and two handfuls of redcurrants, before gently mixing together with a spoon.
5. Place the remaining redcurrants over the prepared base in the tin. Cover with the meringue.
6. Place in the bottom shelf of the preheated oven and bake for 50 minutes. Once cooled, run a knife along the edges, remove the sides of the tin and enjoy.



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Black death: how we solved the centuries-old mystery of its origins and why marmots, not rats, need to hold their paws up

HISTORY

Philip Slavin

It is not an exaggeration to say that the question of where and when the Black Death, the deadliest pandemic ever, originated is one of the biggest mysteries in human history. After all, the Black Death was the first wave of the second plague pandemic of the 14th to early 19th centuries. It killed some 50-60 per cent of the population in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa and an unaccountable number of people in Central Asia.

Different proposals, based on competing theories, have been put forward. But in 2017, I came across some records describing an intriguing medieval cemetery in Kara-Djigach, Chüy Valley, northern Kyrgyzstan, which I suspected may hold the key. As part of a multidisciplinary team co-led by Maria Spyrou at University of Tübingen, we have now investigated several specimens from individuals buried at that site – and come up with an answer.

The idea that the Black Death originated in the east – territories overlapping, roughly speaking, Central Asia, Mongolia and China – dates back to the contemporaries of the pandemic in Europe and the Islamic world. The modern, academic Chinese origin theory dates back to at least 1756-8 and a publication about the history of Central Asia by French scholar Joseph de Guignes.

Other plague historians see Central Asia in general, and the Tian-Shan region, a mountain area on the border between China and Kyrgyzstan, as the Black Death's cradle. But some scholars have argued for alternative regions as diverse as northern Iraq, the Caucasus, Russia's Volga, western Urals or western Siberia, the Gobi desert and India. One historian even suggested that the Black Death beginnings was associated with some unknown cosmic event.

Similarly, the chronological origins of the pandemic have been disputed too. In a 2013 study, a team of microbiologists identified a major evolutionary event in which the main plague lineage (Branch 0) mutated and split into four new plague lineages: Branches 1-4. Dubbed the 'Great Polytoymy' or 'Big Bang', the researchers found that this event created the strain (on Branch 1), associated with the Black Death. The research, which was based on probability computations,

The cuddly marmot's secret is out... he's the world's biggest killer!



dated this event to a period between 1142 and 1339. They also inferred that *Y. pestis* – plague bacterium – may have originated in the Tibetan-Qinghai Plateau in Asia.

Drawing on this work, it has been suggested that the pandemic may have spread widely in the 13th century, thanks to the expansion of the emerging Mongol Empire.

Genetics to the rescue

Without securely dated ancient DNA from Central Asia, however, the question would ultimately remain unsolved. But this changed when I came across records of the Kara-Djigach cemetery – excavated by the Russian archaeologist Nikolai Pantusov in 1885 and 1886 and analysed by the Russian scholar Daniel Chwolson (1819-1911). Of the total 467 stones, covering the

period 1248-1345, 118 are dated to 1338 – a suspiciously large proportion of deaths. Most of the stones have little detail about the person they commemorate, just bearing the names and death dates, but there are ten longer inscriptions from those years, stating 'pestilence' (*mawtana* in Syriac, the language of ancient Syria) as a cause of death.

It was intriguing. Not only that 'pestilence' was mentioned, but that the associated tombstones were all dated to 1338-9 – just seven to eight years before the arrival of the Black Death in Crimea, and its subsequent spread all over west Eurasia and north Africa. I had a strong gut feeling about the likely connection.

We therefore decided to genetically sequence the remains from several specimens from these plague year burials, and managed to



'The Triumph of Death' by Pieter Bruegel the elder (1562), illustrates the deep impression left on the European imagination by the Black death.

get results from the teeth of seven different individuals. Our analysis detected the presence of *Y. pestis* in three specimens, thus confirming that pestilence was indeed caused by this bacterium. We also noted that the strain (on Branch 0) seemed to have just preceded the Great Polytoymy, out of which the Black Death strain emerged shortly after. The study therefore indicates that the Black Death commenced shortly after (or possibly even during) this 1338-9 outbreak.

Of course, there is nothing to suggest that that Kara-Djigach was the specific source of the pandemic. Rather, we believe that the disaster started somewhere in the wider Tian Shan area, perhaps not too far from that site. It is important to bear in mind that *Y. pestis* is a bacterium that lives among wild rodent populations. We often associate

plague with rats. But in Tian Shan, the prevalent rodent carriers of plague are marmots. It is therefore likely that it was their colonies that were the ultimate source of the 1338-9 outbreak.

Importantly, ancient plague strains found today in marmot colonies in Tian Shan plague reservoirs are evolutionarily even older than the Kara-Djigach strain. Therefore, we conclude that the Kara-Djigach strain must have evolved locally in marmot colonies within the extended Tian Shan region, rather than being introduced into the Kara-Djigach community from some faraway origin.

At some point, the bacteria simply crossed over to human inhabitants of the region.

The publication in question has ended the centuries-old debate regarding the spatio-temporal origins of the Black Death. But what else do we take from it? To understand the phenomenon of emerging epidemic diseases, it is essential to have a big evolutionary picture. It is important to see how these diseases develop evolutionary and historically, and avoid treating different strains as isolated phenomena. To understand how the diseases develop and get transmitted, it is also crucial to consider the environmental and socioeconomic contexts.

We also hope that our study will set an example to other historians and scientists that hope to answer such big questions – showing that a collaborative approach involving colleagues from different fields and bringing together different skills, methods, experiences and talents, is the future of historical and paleogenetic research.

Philip Slavin is an Associate Professor of History, University of Stirling



Black Plague devastating pandemic in Naples 1656. Engraved by Micco Spadaro, eyewitness of plague.

Time for a transfer, from the local high school to the football club

FAITH IN SPORT

Dr Colm Hickey

Two things caught my attention recently: the transfer window in football and the wave of public sector strikes—most particularly, those of the Teacher Unions.

There are 32,226 schools in England and 92 Premier and EFL Football clubs. You might think that they are very different. Yet if you look at things through a different prism, you might see that, in many ways, a school and a football club have more in common than you might think and that a football manager and a headteacher share much the same problems. Let me explain.

In the first place, a school year begins in September and ends in the summer, much like a football season. Each autumn, the new school year or football season begins with a renewed sense of optimism, that this year things will be better. In other words, there is a shared belief that results which, after all, is what both a football club and a school are judged by, will improve. Staff or team photographs are taken, and the headteacher or manager outlines the philosophy they will follow, the strategy they will adopt and the targets they will set in order to be successful. Is it going to be 4-3-3, 4-4-2 or 5-3-2? Is it going to be mixed ability or banding or setting?

Whichever strategy you choose will entail getting the 'buy in' of the staff, as they are going to have to work hard to make it successful—even if they may privately think that the strategy is wrong.

Of course, recruitment is vital. You need talent to succeed. You will have to deal with the fact that some young staff want promotion. They may be enticed by the offer of a better job at another club or school. How will you keep them? What inducements can you offer them to make them stay? On the other hand, you may have older staff well past their best on long contracts that you can do little about. Let's face it; neither a school nor a club will want an overpaid underperformer on its books, so you are stuck with them and will have to manage their cynicism in the staff room or training ground. It is a fact that not all staff are equally good. Some are better than others, so you have to do extra work on the training ground or after school insets to improve what you have.

Just as not all staff are equally good, some positions and subjects are relatively more important than others. All teams need a strong spine: a good goalkeeper, a dominant centre half, a midfield general and a deadly striker. Get

Transferring skills from the class room to the football pitch: Far right, Jose Mourinho and Louis Van Gaal



these positions right and you can build a team around them.

In a school, you need excellent English, maths and science departments, along with a pastoral 'enforcer' to keep everyone in line and to make sure that everyone is 'singing from the same hymn sheet.'

The manager or headteacher is not as in charge as many outsiders sometimes think. Oh yes, you get your name on the door and you greet the new signings. You are the face of the club or school and have to front up in media interviews, but you all too quickly find that often your hands are tied behind your back. You are accountable to the Governors – or Board of Directors – who will generally leave you alone if things are going well but who become increasingly twitchy if things start going awry. It could be an issue of staff ill-discipline. It could be a negative news article. It could be bad examination results in a subject or a couple of undeserved and unlucky defeats and the mood can begin to change.

The directors or governors are not in total control either. They are answerable to the English Football League, Premier league or the Football Association or the relevant Local Authority, Academy Trust or Department for Education. You are answerable to some, or all of them, at some time.

Football is a sport and education is a service, but they are both measured, rightly or wrongly, by results. Playing 'the beautiful game' and having an attractive attacking style but losing 4-3 each week will soon get the fans clamouring for the old 'boring, boring Arsenal' chants as you chase a 1-0 win each week

and stay up. In the same way, being a vibrant, inclusive school, rich in extra-curricular activities and with inclusion at its core, means precious little to others if the school fails in the key requirement of affording an education that matches required standards. Finish bottom of the league table and you are finished as a manager or a headteacher.

It is because clubs and schools are assets of local community value that you must work for the community and in the community. Interestingly, this is where there is a close intersection between schools with clubs through the various Community Trust schemes that clubs run. Why do they do it? The answer is simple: for the clubs to get fans to the ground, and for the schools to use the brand of the club to help raise educational attainment.

This leads us to the vexed question of finance. Schools get revenue from pupil numbers: the more you have, the more money you get. In other words, fill the school. For clubs, it is similar; fill the ground. A full school or a full stadium is the clearest possible expression of community support appreciation and endorsement. Get things wrong, and the community will 'vote with its feet'. Fans will stay away, and parents will not send their children to the school, resulting in a demoralising downward spiral of cost cutting in the hope that something will turn the corner and something good will turn up.

Yet it rarely, if ever, does and the answer is usually the merited or unmerited departure of the manager or headteacher. It is a brutal world, but that is life.

Clubs and schools are an integral part of the community. They may have been around for over a century. In other words, they matter. A manager or headteacher is only a custodian of an asset of profound local, emotional and social value. The best you can do is improve it and leave it in a better state than when you found it (think of Brian Clough at Derby County or Nottingham Forest, Bill Shankly at Liverpool or Don Revie at Leeds to name but three).

Teachers are less well-known nationally, but you get the picture. Former PE teacher Paul Clement became Carlo Ancelotti's right hand man at Chelsea, Gerard Houlier managed Liverpool, while Jose Mourinho did the same at a host of clubs. Elsewhere, in Holland, Louis Van Gaal taught PE before winning league titles with Ajax, Barcelona and Bayern Munich; Rinus Michels taught PE at a school for the deaf before winning four Dutch titles, the European Cup, La Liga, a European Championship and making a World Cup final appearance. Gus Hiddink taught in an alternative setting for pupils excluded from school before winning the European Cup, the Intercontinental Cup and then the FA Cup with Chelsea, while Roy Hodgson, who taught at Alleen's School, has won twelve titles and managed England.

Most recently is Graham Potter who, although not a qualified teacher, has considerable educational experience. He graduated from the Open University in December 2005 with a degree in Social Sciences. He then became assistant coach for the England Universities squad, before joining

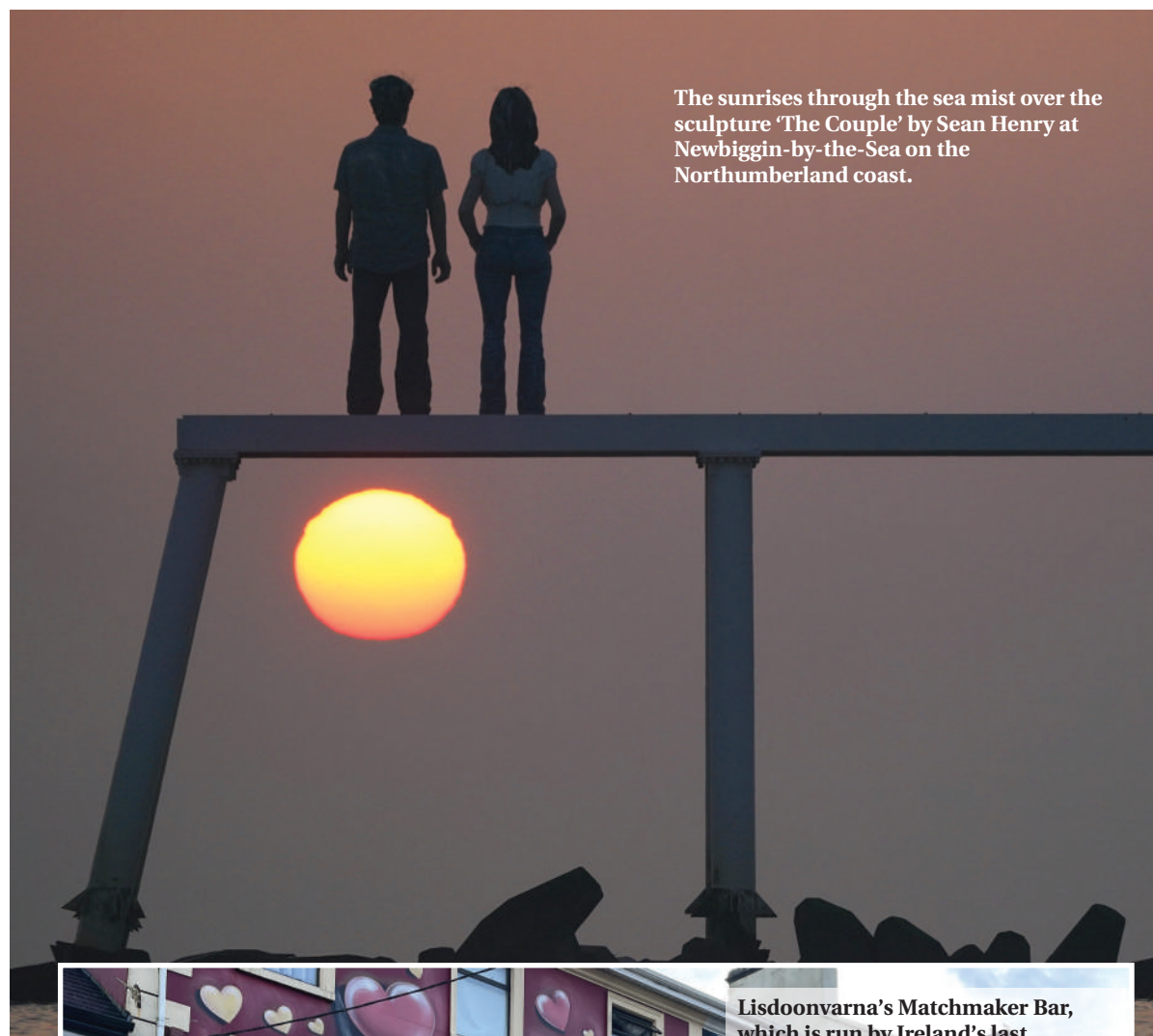


Leeds Metropolitan University (now Leeds Beckett University) in a similar role. While at Leeds, he completed an MSc Leadership: Personal & Professional Development, which focused on using emotional intelligence.

The reality is that being a manager of a football club or a headteacher has relatively little to do with how good a player or classroom teacher you were. Think about it. Many outstanding players have tried and failed at management. Why? Although they were exceptional practitioners, they may have lacked the communication and leadership qualities to succeed in management. Likewise, just because someone is a talented or gifted mathematics teacher does not mean they possess the requisite skills for headship. In the end, football management and headship are all about leadership. So, promoting failed managers from within is unlikely to achieve success for any beleaguered club. It will only work if the appointee has genuine leadership credentials and credibility. Perhaps these clubs should widen their talent pool and consider headteachers. After all, in many cases they could do no worse, and could do a great deal better.

A pictorial round-up of the past seven days...

The Solebay Tapestry installed in the King's Presence Chamber at the Queen's House in Greenwich, south London. The tapestry is the star object in the forthcoming exhibition, *The Van de Veldes: Greenwich, Art and the Sea*.



The sunrises through the sea mist over the sculpture 'The Couple' by Sean Henry at Newbiggin-by-the-Sea on the Northumberland coast.

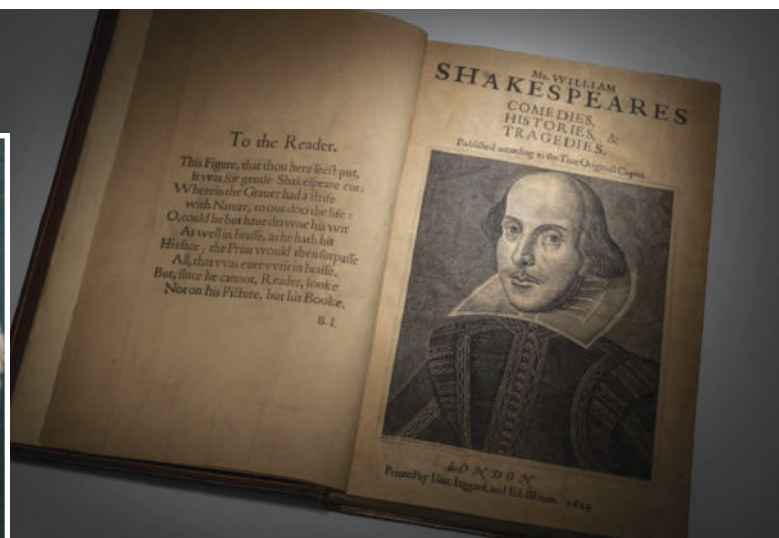


Vitali, an Amur tiger, tackles a heart-shaped ice sculpture made primarily from blood, which was hung from a tree in its outdoor habitat at Blair Drummond Safari and Adventure Park, near Stirling, on Valentine's Day



Lisdoonvarna's Matchmaker Bar, which is run by Ireland's last traditional matchmaker, Willie Daly. Mr Daly has been bringing couples together since he was a teenager by leafing through a leather-bound match-making book, stuffed full with letters from people seeking a partner. His grandfather and father were also matchmakers, from a time when every town in Ireland had their own.

Right, tawny owls at the SSPCA National Wildlife Rescue Centre in Fishcross, Clackmannanshire. They are among the creatures the SSPCA National Wildlife Rescue Centre has previously helped as an animal welfare charity saw calls from people facing the "heart-breaking" decision to give up their pet soar last year amid the cost-of-living crisis.



Three copies of the first printed edition of William Shakespeare's plays – commonly known as the First Folio – will go on display in Scotland to mark 400 years since it was first published. They will be displayed at the University of Glasgow, the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh and Mount Stuart, on the Isle of Bute, at different times this year.

LITURGICAL
CALENDARS

Ordinary Form

Sunday Year A, Weekday Cycle I

Sunday, 19th February: 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time :
Lev. 19:1–2, 17–18; Ps. 103:1–4, 8, 10, 12–13 r. 8; 1 Cor. 3:16–23; Mt. 5:38–48

Monday, 20th February: Ecclus.1:1–10; Ps. 93; Mk.9:14–29

Tuesday, 21st February: St. Peter Damian, Bishop, Doctor of the Church, Ecclus.2:1–11; Ps.37; Mk.9:30–37

Wednesday, 22nd February: Ash Wednesday
Joel 2: 12–18; Ps 51: 3–6, 12–14, 17 r. 3; 2 Cor. 5: 20–6:2; Mt. 6:1–6, 16–18

Thursday, 23rd February: St. Polycarp, Bishop, Martyr
Deut.30:15–20; Ps. 1; Lk.9:22–25

Friday, 24th February: Friday after Ash Wednesday
Isa.58:1–9; Ps. 51; Mt.9:14–15

Saturday, 25th February: Saturday after Ash
Wednesday, Isa.58:9–14; Ps.86; Lk.5:27–32

Extraordinary Form Calendar

Extraordinary Form Calendar according to the Roman Missal of 1962 (Tridentine Rite)

Sunday, 19th February: Quinquagesima Sunday
1 Cor. 13:1–13; Lk. 18:31–43

Monday, 20th February: Feria, Readings of Sunday repeated

Tuesday, 21st February: Feria, Readings of Sunday repeated

Wednesday, 22nd February: Ash Wednesday, Joel 2:12–19; Mt. 6:16–21

Thursday, 23rd February: Feria, Isa. 38:1–6; Mt. 8:5–13

Friday, 24th February: St. Matthias, Apostle, Acts 1:15–26; Mt. 11:25–30

Saturday, 25th February: Feria, Isa. 58:9–14; Mt. 6:47–56

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A man rides his bike past the destroyed Cathedral of the Annunciation, in Iskenderun, Turkey, in the aftermath of the deadly earthquake.
Photo: Umit Bektas, Reuters

